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THE TRUTH, INSPIRATION, AUTHORITY, AND END OF THE SCRIPTURES,

CONSIDERED AND DEFENDED,

IN

EIGHT SERMONS,

PREACHED BEFORE THE

UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD,

IN THE YEAR MDCCXCIII.

AT THE

L E C T U R E

FOUNDED BY THE LATE

REV. JOHN BAMPTON, M.A.

CANON OF SALISBURY.

BY JAMES WILLIAMSON, B.D.

OF QUEEN'S COLLEGE, OXFORD;

PREBENDARY OF LINCOLN, AND RECTOR OF WINWICK, NORTHAMPTONSHIRE.

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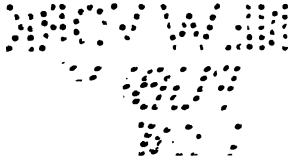

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EXTRACT

FROM THE

LAST WILL AND TESTAMENT

OF THE LATE

REV. JOHN BAMPTON,

CANON OF SALISBURY.

——"I give and bequeath my Lands and "Eſtates to the Chancellor, Maſters, and "Scholars of the Univerſity of Oxford for "ever, to have and to hold all and ſingular "the ſaid Lands or Eſtates upon truſt, and to "the intents and purpoſes hereinafter men-"tioned; that is to ſay, I will and appoint "that the Vice-Chancellor of the Univerſity "of Oxford for the time being ſhall take and "receive

" receive all the rents, iſſues, and profits
" thereof, and (after all reparations and ne-
" ceſſary deductions made) that he pay all
" the remainder to the endowment of eight
" Divinity Lecture Sermons, to be eſtabliſh-
" ed for ever in the ſaid Univerſity, and to
" be performed in the manner following:

" I direct and appoint, that, upon the firſt
" Tueſday in Eaſter Term, a Lecturer be
" yearly choſen by the Heads of Colleges
" only, and by no others, in the room ad-
" joining to the Printing-Houſe, between
" the hours of ten in the morning and two
" in the afternoon, to preach eight Divinity
" Lecture Sermons, the year following, at St.
" Mary's in Oxford, between the commence-
" ment of the laſt month in Lent Term, and
" the end of the third week in Act Term.

" Alſo I direct and appoint, that the eight
" Divinity Lecture Sermons ſhall be preached
" upon either of the following ſubjects—to
" confirm and eſtabliſh the Chriſtian Faith,
" and to confute all heretics and ſchiſmatics

" —upon

" —upon the divine authority of the Holy " Scriptures — upon the authority of the " writings of the primitive Fathers, as to " the faith and practice of the primitive " Church—upon the Divinity of our Lord " and Saviour Jeſus Chriſt—upon the Divi- " nity of the Holy Ghoſt—upon the Arti- " cles of the Chriſtian Faith, as compre- " hended in the Apoſtles' and Nicene Creeds.

" Alſo I direct, that thirty copies of the " eight Divinity Lecture Sermons ſhall be " always printed, within two months after " they are preached, and one copy ſhall be " given to the Chancellor of the Univerſity, " and one copy to the Head of every Col- " lege, and one copy to the Mayor of the " city of Oxford, and one copy to be put " into the Bodleian Library; and the ex- " pence of printing them ſhall be paid out " of the revenue of the Land or Eſtates given " for eſtabliſhing the Divinity Lecture Ser- " mons; and the Preacher ſhall not be paid, " nor be entitled to the revenue, before they " are printed.

" Alſo

" Alſo I direct and appoint, that no per-
" ſon ſhall be qualified to preach the Divi-
" nity Lecture Sermons, unleſs he hath taken
" the Degree of Maſter of Arts at leaſt, in
" one of the two Univerſities of Oxford or
" Cambridge; and that the ſame perſon
" ſhall never preach the Divinity Lecture
" Sermons twice."

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THE IMPORTANCE OF RELIGIOUS TRUTH.

JOHN xviii. 38.

Pilate ſaith unto him, What is truth?

FROM the behaviour of Pilate, who left the place of judgment immediately after he had aſked this queſtion, it is very evident, that he neither expected nor deſired a ſatisfactory anſwer. The variety of opinions, which prevailed in the world, might lead him to conclude, that truth in moſt caſes was not eaſy to be diſcovered. And in the midſt of the ſchemes of worldly riches and grandeur, he might alſo deſpiſe religious truth, as of little importance. That a Heathen ſhould make ſuch a falſe and dangerous deciſion ſeems not to be wonderful; but that Chriſtians ſhould ſometimes ſhut their eyes againſt the cleareſt light of reaſon and revelation, muſt afford matter of

ſerious concern to every ſober and conſiderate mind. All men indeed have not equal abilities or opportunities of cultivating their underſtanding, and delivering themſelves from falſe principles imbibed in their youth; and all truths are not of the ſame importance, nor equally eaſy to be perceived. But though long rooted prejudices have great ſtrength, and it is neceſſary for the ignorant and unlearned to rely much on the inſtructions of others; yet if every one would ſincerely employ his judgment in ſearching the grounds of religion without obſtinacy or malevolence; though truth might not immediately and univerſally prevail, we ſhould ſee men's prejudices vaniſh by degrees, ancient errors corrected or exploded, and the ſpirit of Chriſtian unanimity daily increaſing.

I ſhall therefore in my following diſcourſe,

Firſt, ſhew the importance of religious truth.

Secondly,

Secondly, point out the proper means of diſcerning, which is true of contradictory aſſertions. And,

Thirdly, expoſe the methods, by which artful or bigoted men endeavour to obſcure truth, and adorn falſhood.

First, I am to ſhew the importance of religious truth.

Except we are well inſtructed in religious truth, we ſhall frequently be ignorant of the nature of God, and our duty towards mankind. The pernicious effects of miſtakes in theſe points upon men's conduct, may be ſeen in the lives and behaviour of Heathens, Jews, and Chriſtians. By forming wrong notions of the nature of God, the Heathens not only forſook their Creator to worſhip the hoſt of heaven, and pay divine honours to weak mortals; but, by the attributes and actions, which they aſcribed to their falſe deities, they conſecrated the greateſt crimes by their example, and ſuppoſed them to be

pleaſed and rendered propitious by the moſt cruel and abominable rites. The Jews in the time of our Saviour had undermined the foundation of filial reverence, and made void by their traditions the moſt expreſs commands of God. And through exceſſive zeal, without knowledge, they crucified their long-expected King, and rejected his religion. And even amongſt Chriſtians erroneous principles have hardened men's hearts againſt their brethren, and changed that benevolence, which is declared by our Saviour to be the characteriſtic mark of his diſciples, into bigotry, hatred, envy, and many other bad qualities, which foment diviſions. Such being the effect of ignorance and error upon men's religious conduct, we cannot be too careful to furniſh our minds by all proper methods with every neceſſary and important truth.

But if mankind were univerſally diſpoſed to embrace the truth, and no one had any deſire to deceive others, or artfully diſguiſe the falſhood of his own opinions, the conſequence

ſequence would be, that though ſome might remain ignorant or miſtaken in a few points of little importance; yet the light of religious knowledge would rapidly increaſe, men would ſpeedily apply to the true ſources of divine wiſdom, and unanimity and benevolence would in courſe prevail, and pave the way for the entrance of all other virtues. For it is not in this world only that religious truth is uſeful and neceſſary; ſince it has no ſmall influence upon our eternal ſalvation. Errors in doctrine are ſeldom harmleſs: they have a natural tendency to introduce greater, and thus weaken or deſtroy the chief principles of our faith. Many of them tend likewiſe to corrupt men's moral conduct. And as far as this is owing to wilfulneſs or groſs negligence, it muſt hinder in proportion their juſtification. For though the uncharitable and malicious are apt to think that their zeal will compenſate for their miſtakes, and that a full perſuaſion of the rectitude of their opinions, however acquired, will ſanctify their moſt cruel and unjuſt actions; yet they neither judge thus

in the caſe of others, nor will the ſupreme Being allow the excuſes, by which men palliate or juſtify thoſe deeds, which they own to be condemned by the general rules of juſtice. God has given no one liberty to eſpouſe falſhood. And though he will ſhew mercy to involuntary ignorance; yet he requires from all that they ſhould make uſe of the faculties, which he has beſtowed upon them, to diſcern the truth, and will ſeverely puniſh ſuch as pervert their abilities to deceive others, and impoſe upon the ſimplicity, credulity, or prejudices of mankind. Thus we may ſee that both our preſent and future intereſt invite us to cultivate religious truth; ſince every error naturally leads to others, and may produce, if not corrected, the moſt ſerious and fatal conſequences to our knowledge, diſpoſitions, morals, and happineſs. I proceed,

Secondly, to point out the proper means of diſcerning, which is true of contradictory aſſertions.

And

And firſt, if we are deſirous of embracing truth, and rejecting falſhood, we ſhould fix in our minds ſound principles drawn from proper ſources. All real knowledge muſt proceed from ſenſe, reaſon, or information. And as religion is much converſant with what is at preſent inviſible, religious wiſdom muſt conſiſt more in giving ear to authentic information, than in our own experience or uncertain conjectures. We muſt therefore, in order to be wiſe unto ſalvation, employ our reaſon, with modeſty and humility, to diſcern the authenticity and diſcover the ſenſe of divine revelation; and give up ourſelves to be guided by the will of God, notwithſtanding the oppoſition of our depraved nature.

And if we deſire to find out the truth, we ſhould cultivate our reaſon by all the means in our power. We ſhould endeavour to acquire an habitual readineſs in claſſing every ſubject in its proper place, in diſcovering all its qualities, and diſcerning which are to be eſteemed properties, and which

accidental; in diſtinguiſhing between realities and appearances; and giving its due weight to every argument on either ſide of a queſtion. Though this might be performed to a great degree by a frequent exertion of our own natural powers; yet it may tend to accelerate this uſeful work, to ſupply deficiencies, and to prevent miſtakes, if we add the help of ſome artificial ſyſtem, and unite the wiſdom of our anceſtors with our own abilities. It is true that this art has formerly been diſgraced by being employed upon uſeleſs ſubjects, and often made the inſtrument of defending falſhood, rather than diſcovering the truth. But this affords no juſt argument againſt the improvement of our reaſon; ſince there is nothing in this world, however excellent, which cannot be abuſed to the purpoſes of folly and vice. He is moſt likely to form a juſt concluſion, who habitually views objects in a true light, and depends more or leſs upon his own underſtanding, according to the opportunities he has had to be well informed. But though the uſe of ſome ſyſtem may prevent the wan-

wanderings of our imagination; yet we ſhould not be ſo bigoted to any particular method, as to think it a key to the reaſoning of all ages and nations. There may be ſome difficulty to underſtand the meaning and full force of ancient arguments, if we do not rightly obſerve what propoſitions were omitted, as ſo evidently true in the opinion of both parties, as not to require to be proved, or even mentioned.

Laſtly, if we deſire to embrace the truth, let us clear our minds of all prejudices, that have any tendency to lead us aſtray. When by education we have contracted a love for any ſociety or perſons, we are inclined to palliate their faults, and to entertain a favourable opinion of all their doctrines. And if we are bred up to hate or deſpiſe our adverſaries, we ſhall in like manner be induced to detract from their virtues, and diſallow their judgment. Hence ariſe ſects and parties, who are ready to be convinced in ſome caſes by the weakeſt arguments, and in others to withſtand the ſtrongeſt proofs.

proofs. But though we ſhould examine every doctrine according to our abilities, and not believe any thing merely becauſe we were taught it before we arrived at the full uſe of our underſtanding; yet we are not to be lukewarm in religion, or reject without diſtinction the opinions of our former years. For when we are commanded to *prove all things*, we are ordered likewiſe to *hold faſt that which is good.* A candid examination may often convince us, that we have been well inſtructed from our youth. A habit of doubting therefore, carried too far, is equally dangerous with implicit confidence. Truth, then, ſhould always excite our zeal according to its importance, whether it agrees or diſagrees with our preſent tenets, and whether we are indebted for it to the information of others, or our own diſcovery. I proceed,

Thirdly, to expoſe the methods, by which artful or bigoted men endeavour to obſcure truth, and adorn falſhood.

One method, by which men recommend falſhood

falſhood in preference to truth, is by poſitive aſſertions of falſe principles or pretended facts, and contempt or ridicule of what are true. Weak and ignorant perſons are ready to believe, without proof, what they hear aſſerted by thoſe of ſuperior knowledge and underſtanding, provided it neither injures their temporal intereſt, nor contradicts their deſires. Hence we often ſee in controverſy very doubtful propoſitions taken for granted, unſupported facts boldly aſſerted, credible teſtimony ſlighted or denied, and important truths treated with contempt. The miſchief ariſing from this practice is very extenſive; as innumerable falſe concluſions may be drawn from erroneous principles and miſtaken facts, and men are with difficulty convinced, that they have hitherto been deceived in what they looked upon as axioms and uncontroverted truths.

But though men will, in ſupport of their opinions, however falſe and prejudicial, proceed ſometimes to inconceivable lengths; yet in general they are more artful, and leave their

their readers to draw falſe concluſions from inſinuations founded upon premiſes partly true, or facts that are miſrepreſented and diſtorted in their circumſtances. The connection between two propoſitions is not always perceived. Hence men may impoſe upon the ſimple by ſhewing what concluſion they would wiſh to form, and producing as an argument, what is in ſome ſenſe true, or not eaſy to be confuted; though in the ſenſe required by juſt reaſoning it is entirely falſe, or has little or no reference to the ſubject in debate.

And as many propoſitions are neither univerſally true, nor univerſally falſe; deceivers often impoſe upon the weak by making them believe that to be univerſally true, which is ſo only in ſome particular circumſtances. In morality, the relation, ſituation, and other circumſtances of an agent create a conſiderable difference in the nature of ſome actions, which appear ſimilar to an inattentive obſerver. In ſocieties likewiſe free will and the various diſpoſitions of mankind

mankind cauſe them, when influenced by the ſtricteſt connections, to act in a different manner, though impelled by the ſame outward motives. We ſhall therefore be liable to error and deluſion, if we neglect to mark every circumſtance, upon which depends the truth or falſhood of any propoſition; or if we praiſe, blame, or excuſe the conduct of a ſociety in general for the good or bad behaviour of a few individuals.

And even when men aſcribe particular qualities to their proper ſubjects, they may deceive the unwary by repreſenting them better or worſe than they really are. When we praiſe the goodneſs of an action, or the juſtneſs of an opinion, the good may be exaggerated, or the neceſſary limitations overlooked. And in like manner, where there is ſome ground for blame, the cenſure may be too ſevere on the one hand, or the fault too much palliated on the other. Thus, when we hear the ſame action related by a friend and an enemy, the degree of good or evil is often ſo increaſed or diminiſhed by favour

favour or hatred, that every impartial perſon may eaſily perceive, that one or both opinions muſt be very far diſtant from the real truth.

Another method of deceiving is, by a change of the ſubject, to put the reſemblance for the reality, and thus obtain praiſe or procure blame for what deſerves the reverſe. The motive, means, or manner of an action often contribute much to its goodneſs, or enhance its guilt. The ſame action may be virtuous or vicious, as it agrees with the will of God and the happineſs of our neighbour, or is attended with ſuch circumſtances, as contradict his laws, and violate the duties of civil ſociety. By diſregarding theſe diſtinctions, the name of liberty has frequently been uſed for a cloak of maliciouſneſs, a juſt ſeparation from the corruptions of a tyrannical church is branded with the crime of hereſy and ſchiſm, and hypocriſy of various kinds has been recommended and dignified with the name of religion.

But

But a ſtill more fruitful ſource of error conſiſts in an application to the paſſions to determine difficulties, inſtead of ſubmitting them to the deciſion of reaſon. A man under the influence of intereſt or inclination, often ſhuts his eyes againſt the light, and rejects every evidence below the teſtimony of his ſenſes, which tends to refute his favourite miſtake. It is almoſt incredible, if it were not proved both by hiſtory and experience, to what abſurdities men's paſſions will excite them; and how often by the force of prejudice they believe the moſt unlikely facts upon weak evidence, and reject what is not only probable in itſelf, but confirmed by the teſtimony of impartial witneſſes.

When theſe methods of deceit have been ſucceſsful any time, they prepare the way to an implicit faith in men's perſons, which affords the moſt dangerous and extenſive means of ſpreading erroneous notions. It is true, that a wiſe and good teacher would, if implicitly followed, lead his diſciples into the

the way of holineſs. But ſtill implicit faith in men's religious opinions, without reſpect to their conformity with ſome ſuperior rule, is neither uſeful nor ſafe; as it expoſes us to be led aſtray by the folly and wickedneſs of the preſumptuous or artful. A good man would deſire, that his followers ſhould know, as far as they are capable, the grounds of their faith. And it is more his wiſh and endeavour, that they ſhould profit in religion, than be attached to his perſon. The lower and more ignorant part of mankind muſt to a certain degree be guided by their ſuperiors in knowledge, to prevent the ill effects of their own miſtakes. But this confidence ſhould be founded upon their integrity, and not extended to thoſe inſtances, where all are plainly capable of judging for themſelves, and can ſee the doctrines of their teachers contradicted by ſuperior authority.

As therefore it is ſometimes prudent to follow, and ſometimes to reject, the opinions of others; deceivers endeavour to gain the admiration of their followers by the appear-

ance

ance of wiſdom and holineſs, or condeſcend to the mean art of flattering their paſſions, and exciting their pride. At the ſame time they frequently prejudice their minds againſt the true doctrines of religion, by a malicious aggravation of the faults of their opponents, by ridicule and contempt of their perſons, or illiberal abuſe of their practices and opinions. And we need not wonder, that ſuch arts are uſed, in theſe days, to render contemptible the regular and orthodox miniſters of God, and that they ſometimes meet with ſucceſs; when we are told in Scripture, that the authority of St. Paul, who was endowed with a variety of ſupernatural gifts, was deſpiſed by ſome of the Corinthians, becauſe his bodily preſence ſeemed mean, and his ſpeech contemptible.

And as we muſt rely upon teſtimony for the knowledge of facts, which we have not ſeen, and doctrines, which reaſon alone cannot fully diſcover; another door is opened for deceit, if the nature and extent of this teſtimony is miſrepreſented or miſtaken.

The proof of ſuch facts and doctrines depends upon their delivery, by credible authors, in terms ſufficiently plain; and if they are not thus ſupported, they may be ſafely diſbelieved.

A negative argument then, to have due force, requires a total ſilence of all credible authors upon the ſubject in diſpute. And it is evidently a weak or falſe concluſion, though it may impoſe upon the prejudiced and ignorant, to doubt or deny a doctrine ſupported by clear teſtimony, becauſe it is not mentioned in ſome particular places, is not repeated more than once or twice, and is not delivered in a certain mode of expreſſion. This method of reaſoning in religious affairs would ſubject revelation to the caprice, obſtinacy, and perverſeneſs of man, and make our weak reaſon a competent judge of the wiſdom and rectitude of the divine proceedings. To conceal therefore wilfully any material paſſages, to weaken the force of others by trifling objections, or to reverſe the meaning of any ſentence by an imperfect

imperfect quotation, are arts, which betray a conſciouſneſs of an unſound cauſe, and give reaſon to ſuſpect, that the perſon who employs them is more eager to purſue victory than truth.

But whatever arts men uſe to pervert the truth and recommend falſhood, the former is ſo ſimple, amiable, uſeful, and conſiſtent, and the latter ſo pernicious and full of contradictions, that the moſt bigoted minds would be frequently undeceived, if they were permitted to judge fairly of the different pretenſions of ſuch as deſire to inſtruct them in religion. Hence impoſtors and deceivers, and even perſons who are themſelves miſtaken, commonly deliver their falſeſt aſſertions in ſuch general or equivocal terms, uſe ſuch a vague latitude in their conceſſions and limitations, and leave their meaning, where it ought moſt to be explained, in ſuch uncertainty, that they can elude the force of a direct charge, and repreſent their antagoniſt as guilty of a malicious accuſation. The ſupporters of truth are thus looked

upon as deceivers, and expoſed to the diſgrace that belongs to falſhood.

Obſcurity is indeed ſo favourable to falſhood, that we often find the firſt attempt to propagate falſe doctrines undertaken with caution. They are for a time rather dropt in hints, than aſſerted in form; and repreſented as harmleſs opinions, than inſiſted on as neceſſary truths. But when they have eſcaped contradiction by being thus diſguiſed; the maſk is thrown off by degrees, and at laſt they are aſſumed as maxims too evident to need any poſitive proof, and which cannot be denied without the loſs of our claim to judgment, candour, learning, and common ſenſe. The proper teſts of truth are thus overlooked and deſpiſed, and the deciſion of the moſt important queſtions made to depend upon the arts of ſophiſtry, the pretenſions of confidence, and the prevalence of the paſſions of the weak and ignorant.

Since then truth is the guide to happineſs, both here and hereafter, and all falſhood

hood is inconſiſtent with the purity of God, let us withdraw our confidence from every teacher, and guard againſt his arts, who wilfully endeavours to miſrepreſent or conceal the truth; and let us not only reſolve to avoid the uſe of all fraud and deceit, but ſo cultivate our reaſon, and improve our judgment, that we may likewiſe eſcape all miſtakes and deluſions.

THE TRUTH OF THE SCRIPTURES.

JOHN vi. 68.

Then Simon Peter anſwered him, Lord, to whom ſhall we go? thou haſt the words of eternal life.

WHEN we conſider the ſhortneſs of human life, we muſt naturally be anxious to know what ſtate will ſucceed, and by what means we may ſecure eternal happineſs. Philoſophy could diſcover the probability, that death would not terminate man's exiſtence; it could ſhew the excellence of virtue, and likewiſe the propriety of a future diſtinction between the righteous and the wicked. But unaſſiſted reaſon muſt have many doubts and difficulties concerning heavenly doctrines. Revelation alone could declare with certainty the true nature of God, the extent of our

duty, and the means of being juſtified and admitted to a ſtate of purity and bliſs. The Holy Scriptures, which were finiſhed by the doctrines of our Lord and his Apoſtles, profeſs to contain this revelation. And when we conſider their ſuperiority over the claims of pretenders to inſpiration, the ancient ſyſtems of human wiſdom, or the boaſted light of modern philoſophy, we may well ſay in the words of my text, *Lord, to whom ſhall we go? thou haſt the words of eternal life.* I ſhall therefore in my following diſcourſe endeavour to eſtabliſh the truth of the Holy Scriptures.

Firſt, by ſhewing the external evidence, that they contain the revealed will of God. And,

Secondly, by conſidering the internal marks of their truth and authenticity, which may be diſcovered in their compoſition. And

Firſt, I am to ſhew the external evidence, that the Scriptures contain the revealed will of God.

As

As the Holy Scriptures were conveyed to the world by the hands of men, and not viſibly ſent down by an angel from heaven; it was proper, and almoſt neceſſary, that they ſhould be proved to contain the word of God, by ſome external evidence, and not rely entirely upon the credibility of their writers, or their own intrinſic excellence. Accordingly the publication both of the Old and New Teſtament was attended by numerous and ſtupendous miracles, by which God manifeſtly declared his concurrence, and added his ſanction. And during the Moſaic diſpenſation, he occaſionally ſhewed his power in the ſame manner for the protection of innocence, the defence of his people, or the vindication of his honour. The Scripture miracles are a convincing proof of a divine commiſſion. Every effect muſt be produced by a proportionable cauſe. When, therefore, we ſee a work that exceeds the ordinary powers of nature, its author muſt be ſome intelligent being; and if it be impoſſible to be wrought by any creature, without ſupernatural aſſiſtance, it muſt neceſſarily

ceſſarily be aſcribed to the operation of the Almighty, or his commiſſioned agents. This reaſoning ſeems both plain and forcible; adapted to the level of the weakeſt and moſt uncultivated underſtanding, and not to be denied by the moſt learned, if free from prejudice, or evaded by the moſt acute. A late infidel writer * has indeed endeavoured to repreſent all miracles as incredible, under the notion that every fact, which contradicts experience, is oppoſed by as ſtrong teſtimony, as is brought in it's ſupport.

But here it ſhould be obſerved, that a miracle does not contradict experience in ſuch a manner, as to demonſtrate that either of them is falſe. Reaſon teaches, that a natural cauſe acting in the ſame circumſtances will always be followed by the ſame effect. But the longeſt and moſt uniform experience will by no means prove, that a different or even a contrary effect may not be produced by a different cauſe. A miracle is not pretended to be wrought by natural cauſes. The proof therefore of its reality

* Hume.

ariſes

ariſes partly from the evidence of men's ſenſes, that ſuch an effect is produced, and partly from experimental knowledge, that the powers of nature are not able to perform ſuch a work alone. Unleſs, therefore, we deny the power of God to direct and controul the laws of nature, or ſuppoſe, without proof, that he has bound himſelf never (for any reaſon) to make the leaſt alteration, we muſt grant miracles to be poſſible in themſelves; and need only examine, whether thoſe recorded in Scripture be worthy of God, and conſequently credible, as requiring his hand, being wrought for an end agreeable to his will, upon occaſions ſufficiently important, ſubmitted to the plain ſenſe and reaſon of the beholders, and delivered to poſterity upon ſtrong and impartial teſtimony. The miracles recorded in Scripture were great, and required the concurrence of the God of Nature. Moſes ſhewed that he could direct and controul the elements, and our Saviour not only cured the moſt obſtinate diſeaſes, but diſplayed an abſolute authority over the grave and the powers of darkneſs.

darkneſs. They were likewiſe, in general, publicly wrought before friends and enemies, attended with ſome declaration or ſign, that ſuch an effect would be produced, and performed in ſo ſhort a time, as precluded all poſſibility of contrivance or deceit. Their end alſo was worthy of a juſt, merciful, and beneficent God. They were deſigned to puniſh atrocious offenders, to protect the innocent, to give credit to the prophets, or to introduce a religious diſpenſation. If the inſtruction of mankind in religious knowledge be a ſufficient reaſon for God to beſtow and confirm a revelation of his will, and the dignity of Chriſt with the end of his coming be of ſuch importance, that they deſerve to be proved by all kinds of evidence, the miracles of the Old and New Teſtament were not wrought in vain, or for a cauſe unworthy of divine interference.

But it may be objected, that of whatever force the teſtimony of miracles might be to thoſe, by whom they were ſeen, they come to us with diminiſhed authority. To this it may

may be anſwered, that if we have credible evidence of their being really wrought, they are a ſufficient foundation for our belief, though in this caſe we walk by faith, and not by ſight. The age of our Saviour and his Apoſtles was famous for learning; yet their miracles were not only acknowledged by the converts to chriſtianity, from Jewiſh prejudices and Heathen ſuperſtitions; but the reality of the facts was allowed even by their adverſaries, who, after full opportunities of diſcerning the truth, and ſufficient motives to make them eager to detect the leaſt deceit, aſcribed them to magic, or ſome other inadequate or improbable cauſe. And if we grant the exiſtence of our Saviour's miracles, the reſt, mentioned in the Old Teſtament, are not only ſupported by the uniform tradition of the Jewiſh nation, but confirmed by the teſtimony of him and his diſciples.

Another external proof of the truth of the Scriptures is prophecy. As miracles are chiefly adapted to the age, in which they are

are wrought, and can have no farther weight with ſucceeding generations, than as they are authenticated by ſenſible, honeſt, and unprejudiced witneſſes: ſo prophecy is ſuited to convince thoſe, who ſee its predictions fulfilled; and, when firſt delivered, can only have the effect of a ſolemn appeal to God, which will be of greater or leſs weight according to the prudence and moral character of the prophet. Indeed, as prophecies may be fulfilled at different periods, a prophet may obtain honour, even in his life, if he foretells what is accompliſhed at a ſhort diſtance; provided the event is too obſcure to be diſcovered by human wiſdom, or too difficult to be compaſſed by human contrivance. In this caſe the evidence of divine aſſiſtance, in one inſtance, forms a ſufficient aſſurance, that it will not fail in another. And ſuch an argument cannot be overthrown or rejected by a ſound reaſoner, unleſs a prophecy, which relies upon equal or ſimilar authority, ſhould be proved to have evidently failed. In like manner, when we ſee with our own eyes ſome remarkable and im-

portant

portant predictions, confeſſedly delivered many centuries paſt, at this time fulfilling without the concurrence of men's ſecular intereſt, we have not only a proof from thence of the truth of Chriſtianity and the Holy Scriptures, but may firmly believe, that all thoſe, which are recorded in the ſame books, really came to paſs in their reſpective ſeaſons; as none of them are diſproved by contemporary writers. The prophecies of Scripture frequently contained circumſtances very unlikely to happen at the time of their delivery; and were either beyond the power of the prophet to effect by natural means, if they were to be fulfilled ſoon, or their accompliſhment was deferred ſo long, that his authority, influence, and connections muſt have been entirely diſſolved. They were often, likewiſe, attended with circumſtances ſeemingly contradictory till explained by the event, and ſome of them ſo caſual, that they could only be noticed in due ſeaſon by that Providence, which ſees at one view all that will come to paſs from the beginning to the end of the world.

The

The prophecy of Eliſha, that the city would be reſcued from a moſt grievous famine in the ſpace of one day, muſt have overwhelmed him with ſhame, if he had not been divinely inſpired. And an impoſtor, who had truſted to chance alone, would never have added, that the unbelieving lord, who was thus forewarned, ſhould live to ſee the truth of the prediction, and yet not enjoy the common deliverance. The prophecy to Jeroboam, the firſt king of Iſrael, that his altar ſhould be deſtroyed by ſome future king of Judah, conſidering the civil and religious enmity between the two kingdoms, might have been hazarded without any claim to ſuperior wiſdom, if it had been generally delivered without any limitation. But when we read, that it was to be fulfilled by a child born to the houſe of Judah, named Joſiah, and find it accompliſhed at the diſtance of three hundred years, we ſee the hand of God evidently diſplayed. Joſiah was named, when his diſpoſition was not known. He reigned eighteen years before he attempted to deſtroy idolatry. His life

was

was ſhort. And except he had been divinely conducted in his undertakings, he might eaſily have omitted the deſtruction of this altar. The former kings of Judah had no authority in the land of Iſrael. And the power of his ſucceſſors was ſoon diminiſhed, till the whole nation was led into captivity. When therefore we ſee only one Joſiah amongſt all the kings of Judah, who fulfilled this prophecy without any particular knowledge or intention, the hand of God is remarkably evident in diſpoſing the events of this world in ſuch a manner, as may diſplay at once both his power and his providence.

The prophecies concerning the fate of Babylon, Tyre, Jeruſalem, and Egypt, are of ſuch a nature, as could not have been hazarded upon mere conjecture without a manifeſt probability of failure and detection. That they are as ancient as they pretend, we have neither reaſon nor authority to entertain a doubt. And though cities and kingdoms are liable to decay; yet that proud

Babylon ſhould fall from its higheſt grandeur within ſeventy years, was a fact, that could only be foreknown by the divine wiſdom. The agreement of theſe prophecies with the preſent ſtate of the world is equally clear. Babylon is ſo completely a pool of water, according to the words of Iſaiah and Jeremiah, that its very ruins cannot be diſcovered. Tyre, whoſe merchants were princes, is now a miſerable habitation for fiſhermen. Jeruſalem is ſtill trodden down of the Gentiles. And Egypt, which was famous for wiſdom, riches, and power, continues a baſe kingdom, and has been in abject ſlavery many hundred years.

The Arabians afford likewiſe a ſtrong inſtance of the truth of the Scripture prophecies. That Iſhmael ſhould be a wild man, his hand againſt every man, and every man's hand againſt him, and yet dwell in the preſence of all his brethren, are circumſtances, which were never found conſiſtent for any length of time, except in the caſe of the Arabians and the Romans. It is the moſt unlikely

unlikely of a people, ſituated in the centre of the world, and near to powerful and civilized nations. Yet we neither find by hiſtory, that they were ever completely conquered by the Perſians or Romans, nor do we ſee their independence leſſened to this very day.

But the diſperſion of the Jews is a prophecy moſt convincing to our ſenſes; becauſe it was the lateſt delivered, is viſible in all nations, and has been continued without intermiſſion from the age of the Apoſtles to the preſent time. This is likewiſe the ſtrongeſt proof of the truth of our Saviour's pretenſions, when we ſee that God for his death and rejection has ſo ſeverely puniſhed his choſen people; whom he yet preſerves, and promiſes to reſtore, in remembrance of his covenant with Abraham, Iſaac, and Jacob. This judgment ſhould make us careful not to imitate their infidelity. And their relation to God by adoption ſhould make us pity, rather than deſpiſe, their hardneſs of heart.

It may be obſerved concerning prophecies, eſpecially of great importance, that they are moſtly obſcure before the event. If they had been otherwiſe, their enemies muſt often have been reſtrained by a miracle from attempting to hinder their accompliſhment; and their friends would ſometimes have diſgraced their Divine original by ſtriving to fulfil them by human contrivance. And even after the event we may in ſome find ſmall circumſtances, which cannot be proved entirely to correſpond. If the fact be conveyed to us by hiſtory, every minute particular may not be recorded. And if we ſee it with our own eyes, we may not accurately obſerve things, which are of leſs moment; or we may poſſibly be miſtaken in our interpretation. It ſhould therefore be eſteemed ſufficient, that the great outlines of every prophecy be clear to all capacities, that we ſee no part evidently contradicted, and that there be ſuch a correſpondence between the prediction and the event, as could not be diſcovered by human wiſdom, or brought about by human power.

And

And here it ſeems proper to take notice of an objection * lately urged to the prophecy concerning the Jews, that our Saviour "deciſively foretold, that the genera-"tion then exiſting ſhould not be totally "extinguiſhed, till it had witneſſed his ſe-"cond and glorious appearance in the clouds "of heaven." Our Saviour's prophecy concerning the puniſhment of the Jews, and his ſecond coming to judge the world, is partly accompliſhed in the deſtruction of Jeruſalem and the diſperſion of the nation, partly we ſee it fulfilling before our eyes in the preſent ſtate of the Iſraelites, and partly we perceive it not yet fulfilled, as the world ſtill continues, though we firmly expect Chriſt to be our judge. When we ſee ſo much of this prophecy diſtinctly and wonderfully fulfilled, and have ſuch abundant teſtimony that Chriſt will hereafter come in the glory of his Father with his holy angels, we ſhould rather think that the words, which reſpect the time of this event, ought to be underſtood in

* Dr. Edwards, in a Sermon preached before the Univerſity of Cambridge, May 23, 1790. p. 19, l. 17.

ſome other ſenſe, which at the laſt day will be proved conſiſtent with the reſt, than that our Saviour and his Apoſtles were either miſtaken themſelves, or taught their followers what they did not know to be true. When it is ſaid in St. Matthew, (xvi. 28.) *Verily I ſay unto you, there be ſome ſtanding here, which ſhall not taſte of death, till they ſee the Son of Man coming in his kingdom,* it does not follow, though this ſentence be cloſely connected with the mention of the day of judgment, that by coming in his kingdom our Saviour meant to deſcribe his moſt ſolemn and glorious act of royalty. His kingdom commenced at his reſurrection, and he may in a very fit ſenſe be ſaid to be ſeen coming in his kingdom, whenever we ſee his power diſplayed in any ſignal act of vengeance upon his enemies, though he is not at that time perſonally viſible. The rule here laid down by the author of this objection for the interpretation of words is not univerſally and ſtrictly true. "Whenever," ſays he, * "the ſame word is uſed in the ſame

* P. 14, l. 3.

"ſentence,

" ſentence, or in different ſentences not diſ-
" tant from each other, we ought to inter-
" pret it preciſely in the ſame ſenſe; unleſs
" either that ſenſe ſhould involve a palpable
" contradiction of ideas, or the writer ex-
" preſsly informs us that he repeats the word
" in a freſh acceptation." Almoſt every word has many different meanings, and is uſed in each meaning with more or leſs latitude in different paſſages. Without, therefore, any contradiction of ideas or expreſs declaration of the writer, we may judge that he uſes the ſame word not *preciſely* in the ſame ſenſe, if the ſubject or the context warrant ſuch an interpretation. And as the word *ſee* is frequently uſed for perceive, when no bodily appearance is mentioned, we may grant that Chriſt did not viſibly appear at the deſtruction of Jeruſalem, without giving up our belief in him as a true prophet, or our hopes that he will at the laſt day be the judge and rewarder of his faithful followers. The ſignal overthrow of the Jewiſh kingdom, and the vengeance executed on God's choſen people, are events of ſuch

importance, as may well be deſcribed in the boldeſt language of prophecy. The uſe, therefore, of ſuch ſublime images, as in their literal ſenſe would figure the deſtruction of the world, is not (as this author aſſerts) "to embarraſs revelation with perplexities "or contradictions, or to involve it in Cimmerian darkneſs." We have ſeen the puniſhment of the Jews for their rejection of Chriſt, and we are thence cautioned to beware, that there be not found in any of us an evil heart of unbelief. As long then as the gates of hell cannot prevail for the extinction of chriſtianity; ſo long we ſhall expect, that he will in due ſeaſon fulfil his words, and finally triumph over all his enemies. For though we now only know in part; yet at the laſt day we ſhall know even as we are known, and ſee the truth and conſiſtency of all God's diſpenſations.

"The predictions of the Apoſtles con-"cerning the end of the world," are alſo ſaid* "to furniſh examples of conſiderable error."

* P. 11, l. 5.

But

But it does not appear, that they *knew the times and the ſeaſons, which the Father hath put in his own power*; (Acts i. 7.) or that they had any authority, when they preached the goſpel, to define the time of the general judgment. An exhortation, therefore, not to be overtaken by the ſuddenneſs of Chriſt's coming ought not to be converted into a deciſive prediction, that this event would happen in that very generation. The epiſtles, though directed to the Chriſtians then alive, were intended for the edification of the church to the end of the world. Whatever therefore is ſaid to them, may be underſtood to be ſaid to all; and St. Paul's deſcription of the manner of our change at the day of judgment may be applied to the Chriſtians, who ſhall be then alive. The ſame may be obſerved concerning St. Peter's caution (1 Pet. iv. 7.) *to be ſober*, becauſe *the end of all things is at hand*; and St. Paul's remark to the Hebrews, that they could *ſee the day approaching*. (Heb. x. 25.) St. Paul in his ſecond Epiſtle warns the Theſſalonians *not to be troubled, as if the day of Chriſt was very near*;

(2 Theſſ.

(2 Theſſ. ii. 2.) ſince that day ſhould not come, *till the man of ſin was revealed.* (ii. 3.) And though this expreſſion does not poſitively affirm, that it was at any conſiderable diſtance; yet the deſcription of the man of ſin agrees very well with a ſyſtem of ſpiritual corruption, how long ſoever it may continue. St. Peter alſo informs us, that *there ſhall come in the laſt days, ſcoffers, ſaying, Where is the promiſe of his coming?* (2 Pet. iii. 3, 4.) To this he anſwers, *Beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thouſand years, and a thouſand years as one day. The Lord is not ſlack concerning his promiſe, as ſome men count ſlackneſs.* (iii. 8, 9.) We may therefore conclude, that the coming of our Lord is certain, though it may ſeem to be delayed; and though ſome parts of his prediction may be difficult to be explained at preſent, yet we may reſt aſſured that *heaven and earth ſhall paſs away, but his words ſhall not paſs away.* (Matt. xxiv. 25.)

Another proof of the truth of the Scriptures

tures may be taken from the character of the writers. Moſes was learned in all the wiſdom of the Egyptians, and therefore not to be impoſed upon by rumours and falſe opinions. He has the teſtimony of the author of the Epiſtle to the Hebrews, that he was *faithful to God* (iii. 2.) in the diſcharge of his office. From which we may conclude, that the law, which he impoſed upon his people, was of divine original, and that he could not be guilty of mixing falſhoods with important truths, or giving raſh conjectures for authentic hiſtory. His character has not been aſperſed by any ancient author of credit; and even the impoſtor Mahomet found his memory ſo much revered by the Jews, that he acknowledged his claim as a prophet, though he aſſerted without proof, that his writings had been corrupted. The prophets likewiſe, who, beſides the books which bear their names, are ſuppoſed to have written the hiſtorical part of the Old Teſtament, were men in general of religion and morality, ſent to recall the people from ſin and idolatry, and what puts

puts the matter out of all diſpute, quoted by our Saviour and his Apoſtles as teachers of the way of God, and many of them ſufferers in the cauſe of truth. The actions indeed of Solomon were not always conformable to his knowledge. But his wiſdom is undiſputed. And therefore his authority, except in the caſe of idolatry, muſt be ſtrong in favour of religion, which he has proved in general to be the road to happineſs, even in the preſent world. *Her ways are ways of pleaſantneſs, and all her paths are peace. She is a tree of life to them that lay hold upon her; and happy is every one that retaineth her.* (Prov. iii. 17, 18.) Our Saviour indeed was the only perſon that could ſay without the leaſt exception, *Which of you convinceth me of ſin?* (John viii. 46.) But the Apoſtles and Evangeliſts were holy and wiſe, and could therefore ſtamp an authority upon their writings, even if they had not moſt of them ſealed their ſincerity with their blood, and if their hiſtorical accounts had not been confirmed, as far as can be expected, by profane hiſtory. I proceed,

Secondly,

Secondly, to conſider the internal marks of truth and authenticity, which may be diſcovered in the compoſition of the Scriptures.

When we compare the natural abilities and ſituation of the Apoſtles with the doctrines and precepts of the goſpel, it is certain that in their excellence we may perceive evident marks of divine aſſiſtance. The morality is pure and complete, and ſuperior to the efforts of human wiſdom aided by ſtudy and inſtruction. For though the principal duties of morality are implanted in every man's breaſt, and may be all found diſperſed amongſt the writings of the philoſophers; yet they were delivered by the Apoſtles, who were moſtly illiterate, in a more excellent and uſeful manner. The precepts of the Goſpel point out the ſeveral duties of life in their full extent, without any encouragement of vice, or mixture of falſhood. They are founded upon the plaineſt and moſt engaging principles, and guarded with the ſevereſt ſanctions againſt wilful offenders,

offenders, and the moſt gracious promiſes to the penitent and obedient. We are commanded to make our own reaſonable deſires the rule of our conduct towards others; to ſhew that kindneſs, mercy, and compaſſion to our fellow creatures, to which we are indebted for our preſent life and future proſpects; and to conſider all men as of the ſame family, and therefore naturally united in the bands of friendſhip. All theſe precepts are ſo conſiſtent with each other, and the practice of every virtue ſo neceſſary to a holy life, that the Chriſtian ſyſtem is proved worthy of God; though it would never have been collected by human wiſdom alone, or obeyed by our preſent depraved paſſions without the divine influence of inward grace.

But the conduct of our Saviour is urged by a modern author againſt all attempts of giving a clear and comprehenſive view of the principal doctrines and duties of chriſtianity. "Another remarkable characteriſtic of chriſtianity," ſays he*, "is its ſimplicity." This

* Eſſays Phil. Hiſt. and Lit. vol. i. p. 420.

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we both grant and boaſt of, as it proves the wiſdom of its author, who could form a religion containing ſo many duties in ſuch a manner, that they ſhould all ſpring from the ſame root, that it ſhould be ſo well connected in all its parts, and that ſo many perſons, in diſtant ages, ſhould deſcribe various and yet conſiſtent characters of the ſame Meſſiah. A ſyſtem may be ſimple, as well as complex. And therefore neither this circumſtance, nor the other, "that our Saviour left no records, "or written memorials, reſpecting the end "and object of his miſſion," tends any thing "to the utter confuſion of ſyſtems "or ſyſtem-makers." Our Saviour certainly came into the world for ſome important end. He never meant, that the knowledge of the Goſpel ſhould be confined to a ſingle age, and poſterity remain without information. He left, it is true, no writings of his own. But this is neither an *aſtoniſhing fact*, nor any condemnation of well grounded ſyſtems; ſince he ſent his Apoſtles into all the world to be his witneſſes, and to preach the Goſpel, from whoſe accounts of his life and

and doctrine we have ſufficient materials to learn the nature of our duty, which we are no where forbidden to commit to memory in any manner conſiſtent with the truth. St. Paul informs us what is the true foundation of all ſyſtems of religion: *Other foundation can no man lay, than that is laid, which is Jeſus Chriſt.* (1 Cor. iii. 11.) And in the following verſes he mentions the different event of building properly or improperly upon this foundation. *If any man's work abide, which he hath built thereupon, he ſhall receive a reward. If any man's work ſhall be burnt, he ſhall ſuffer loſs.* (14, 15.) To preach the true doctrines of religion, and to turn many to righteouſneſs, is undoubtedly acceptable in the ſight of God. And we need not be afraid of drawing true concluſions from the Scriptures; but of obſcuring the truth, or promoting falſhoods. The ſum and ſubſtance of the Chriſtian religion does not conſiſt in the facts of our Saviour's life, death, reſurrection, and ſecond coming to judge the world, though we believe the truth and importance of all theſe articles; unleſs

unleſs we join with them the deſign of his ſufferings, the obligation we are under to follow his bright example, and the virtues, which we are called upon to exerciſe, and to the performance of which is annexed the promiſe of our future reward.

But it is farther objected, that "no authentic account of our Saviour's life was "publiſhed till a conſiderable time after his "reſurrection; and even then, not by any "previous or expreſs commiſſion from him, "but to gratify the laudable deſire of the "numerous proſelytes to this new religion;" and that "the Chriſtian religion ſubſiſted "long before St. Paul wrote his celebrated "Epiſtles." This has the appearance of a wiſh to leſſen the authority of both the Epiſtles and the Goſpels; though it calls the former celebrated, and the deſire laudable of peruſing the latter. And ſurely it is equally laudable in us to be eager to know the particulars of our Lord's life and converſation, as it was in the firſt chriſtians. But though we have no expreſs order of our

Saviour for committing his life and doctrines to writing; yet when he gave his diſciples a command to preach the goſpel to the whole world, they were fully juſtified in taking the moſt effectual way for the information of poſterity. And though they might be deſired to write the Goſpels, it by no means follows, that they intended to teach and gratify no others, than thoſe, who lived in the ſame age, and had the benefit of their diſcourſes. The words and acts of our Saviour were publiſhed from the beginning. And if St. Paul wrote the ſame doctrines, they are not to be neglected, becauſe they had before been ſpoken by our Lord and his Apoſtles. Preaching is intended not only to inſtruct mankind in what they do not know; but to prevent them from forgetting uſeful truths. And it is not only evident, that writing is a more probable method of conveying doctrines pure to diſtant generations, than tradition; but we have good reaſon to think, that the latter alone would before this time have loſt moſt of the facts of our Saviour's life, and ſome of the peculiar doc-

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trines of the Chriſtian religion. We ſhould therefore equally eſteem the neceſſary and uſeful writings of the Apoſtles and Evangeliſts, when compoſed at the latter end of their miniſtry, as if they had been publiſhed at the beginning, whilſt they contain the ſame truths. For if we are inclined to reject the doctrines of the inſpired writers for ſuch ſlight cauſes, we may never want a pretence for diſavowing their authority.

The truth of the Scripture is alſo proved internally by the agreement of all its parts with right reaſon, as far as they can be at preſent comprehended, and their conſiſtency with each other. Fable and impoſture commonly betray themſelves by ſome detected falſhood, or manifeſt contradiction. Whereas the adverſaries of chriſtianity are obliged to diſtort the doctrines, and miſrepreſent the facts, of the Old and New Teſtament, before they can perſuade even themſelves, that they are falſe or abſurd. The length of time, which the ſcheme of chriſtianity required, the variety of its parts, and the

number of prophets and other perſons, who contributed their aſſiſtance independent of each other, all conſpired to make deception difficult. And the final accompliſhment by means naturally ſo inadequate amounts to a demonſtration that it proceeded from above. The Scriptures contain the only articles, which concern the whole world; man's creation, fall, and redemption. Their account of the power, knowledge, purity, juſtice, and mercy of God is far beyond the inventions of poets, or the diſcoveries of philoſophers amongſt the Heathen, where they were not aſſiſted by accidental hints from divine revelation. And if we deſcend to the hiſtory of mankind, it is much more reaſonable to ſuppoſe, that man was created innocent, perfect, and happy, than to imagine with ſome of the Heathen poets and orators, that he was deſtitute of all conveniencies, deprived of ſpeech, and reſcued from thoſe evils by the uſe of that reaſon and eloquence, which can ſcarcely be cultivated, except in ſociety. Such a ſtate is unfit for the firſt ſituation of the only reaſonable

ſonable animal; and if it had ever been univerſal, muſt naturally have been attended with the deſtruction of a ſpecies, the individuals of which are ſo weak, and ſubject to ſuch a long and helpleſs infancy. The general promiſe alſo of our redemption was given at the fall, opened by degrees with various circumſtances, and fulfilled at laſt by a ſingle perſon. The ſeveral diſtances between Abraham, Moſes, the Prophets, and Chriſt deſtroy all ſuſpicion of any colluſion. And the concurrence of all the prophecies in the perſon of our Saviour prove that he came from God to fulfil his will.

Since then the Holy Scriptures are proved to be the word of God by a variety of the ſtrongeſt evidence; ſince both the law and the goſpel were uſhered in by a number of well authenticated miracles; ſince the doctrines they teach are ſublime, pure, and beneficial; ſince the characters of their authors are able to ſtamp a credit upon any writings; ſince they are ſo cloſely connected with each other, that we cannot refuſe our aſſent to

parts without diſcrediting the whole; and ſince their authenticity is ſupported by the teſtimony of ſo many nations, and ſuch diſcordant ſects; let us firmly believe the truth of this revelation, and return thanks to God, who has not left us to the light of our imperfect reaſon, but has clearly ſhewn the way to everlaſting life.

THE INSPIRATION OF THE SCRIPTURES.

2 TIM. iii. 16.

All Scripture is given by inſpiration of God.

BEFORE we can ſettle the authority of the Scriptures, it is proper to enquire from whence they are derived; whether from the obſervation, experience, knowledge, and learning of the writers alone, or from the aſſiſtance of ſome ſuperior being. If they had been compoſed only by human abilities, the moſt valuable part of them contained in the New Teſtament would have been an uncertain and inſufficient guide, as the authors were naturally ignorant of many divine truths, full of miſapprehenſions of the nature of chriſtianity, and muſt thence have been guilty, without heavenly aſſiſtance, of innumerable miſtakes. They were

indeed inſtructed during forty days by our Saviour himſelf, concerning the meaning of all the facts, of which they had been eye-witneſſes, and the application of the ancient prophecies to the events of his life. But ſo ſhort a time could only qualify them for the office of teachers, when they were ſupernaturally enabled to recollect all the diſcourſes of our Lord, and could perfectly remember every principal fact of his miniſtry. By the inſpiration then of the Holy Spirit, which was promiſed by Chriſt before his aſcenſion, and granted on the day of Pentecoſt, all their infirmities were ſupplied, and the weak were enabled to confound the ſtrong. As therefore the authority of the Scriptures depends upon the ſource, from whence the writers of them drew their information, I ſhall in my following diſcourſe,

Firſt, ſhew what increaſe of wiſdom we may ſuppoſe the ſacred writers to have received from inſpiration.

Secondly, defend the hiſtory of the Old Teſtament

Teſtament from the charge of fiction or deluſion.

Thirdly, anſwer ſome objections to the doctrine, that the apoſtles were aſſiſted by the ſpirit in thoſe writings, which were not prophetical.

Firſt, I am to ſhew what increaſe of wiſdom we may ſuppoſe the ſacred writers to have received from inſpiration.

As they were appointed to teach mankind religious truths, and lead them gradually to the knowledge of their Redeemer, the aſſiſtance of Heaven muſt be calculated to ſupply their own ſpiritual ignorance, and make them perfect in all neceſſary doctrines. Whatever religious doctrines then we find taught in the Scriptures, we may believe to be true and conſiſtent with each other; though the types and figures of the law, and even the explanations of the prophets, were far from being equal in clearneſs to the Goſpel. The inſpiration of the Old Teſtament,

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and the authenticity of the canon eſtabliſhed by Ezra are confirmed by the authority of our Saviour himſelf; who appeals to the law and the prophets as containing the will of God; and exhorts the Jews to *ſearch the ſcriptures*, (John v. 39.) that they might diſcern the juſtice of his pretenſions. Whatever authority then the ancient ſcriptures had amongſt the Jews is confirmed by our Lord. And as they allowed the loweſt rank of theſe to be ſtyled holy, we muſt conclude, that they were all in general looked upon by the Jews as of heavenly origin. And with reſpect to the Apoſtles, as they were the publiſhers of a better covenant, our Saviour expreſsly promiſes them the aſſiſtance of the *Spirit*, which ſhould *guide them into all truth*. (John xvi. 13.) Though the Apoſtles were conſtant attendants upon our Saviour, during his miniſtry; though they heard his diſcourſes, and ſaw his miracles; and though they were inſtructed by himſelf, after his reſurrection, in the meaning of the ancient prophets; yet they were forbidden to enter upon their office, till they were

farther

farther qualified by Divine inſpiration. *Behold,* ſays he, *I ſend the promiſe of my Father upon you: but tarry ye in the city of Jeruſalem, until ye be endued with power from on high.* (Luke xxiv. 49.) However low, therefore, we may be inclined to ſettle the inſpiration of the ſacred writers, we muſt ſuppoſe them made perfect in the knowledge of ſuch religious truths, as they propoſed to teach; or we ſhall be guilty of groſs abſurdity in ſuppoſing that God neglected to inſtruct his miniſters in the meſſage, which they were ſent to deliver. As religion was the buſineſs of both the Prophets and the Apoſtles, they do not ſeem to have had their faculties enlarged, or their knowledge ſupernaturally informed in any other matters. But in what was connected with piety or morality, we muſt either deny all inſpiration, or conclude that their doctrines are true, their accounts certain, and their reaſoning without miſtake. They were not only favoured with heavenly aſſiſtance in thoſe truths, which lay beyond the reach of human faculties; but were commanded to rely upon inſpi-

inſpiration, where their own abilities might have furniſhed them with a ſufficient, though leſs perfect defence. *When they bring you unto the ſynagogues, and unto magiſtrates, and powers, take ye no thought how or what things ye ſhall anſwer, or what ye ſhall ſay: for the Holy Ghoſt ſhall teach you in the ſame hour what ye ought to ſay.* (Luke xii. 11, 12.) But ſtill it does not appear, that this inſpiration was ever intended to ſuperſede the uſe of their reaſon or ſenſes. It ſupplied the deficiencies; but left them all the abilities of human nature.

We may therefore ſafely grant, that the writers of the Old and New Teſtament were allowed the choice of their own words, provided they expreſſed the meaning, which was neceſſary to convey the true doctrines of religion. And we may juſtly ſuppoſe, that where the exerciſe of reaſon, or the teſtimony of the ſenſes were fully ſufficient to confirm a doctrine or authenticate a fact, the authority of inſpiration might not be ſuperadded. But this is no cauſe, why we

ſhould

ſhould give up to raſh ſuſpicions a great part of the Bible, as falſe or fabulous, and thence weaken the authority of the reſt, with which it is connected. Every part of the ſcripture does not contain doctrines or facts of equal importance; but we have no ſufficient authority for pronouncing any part of it falſe, or too inſignificant for the divine notice. The doctrines of chriſtianity, the predictions of the prophets, and the precepts of the law, which we are informed was *our ſchoolmaſter to bring us unto Chriſt*, (Gal. iii. 24.) cannot be denied to be of divine original by any, who does not wiſh to diſbelieve all inſpiration. And though the hiſtorical part of the Old Teſtament is leaſt connected with religious doctrines, and a narrative of facts, eſpecially delivered by contemporary authors, may deſerve full credit without the aid of inſpiration; yet let us remember, that the hiſtory of Moſes is intermixed with the precepts of the law, and that the evangeliſts relate the diſcourſes of our Saviour, as well as the facts of his life. We cannot perceive in all caſes the degree of connection between

between temporal and ſpiritual ſubjects; nor can we decide with accuracy, how far the obſervation and memory of our Lord's diſciples might enable them to give a full account of his actions without divine aſſiſtance. But if we believe, that the Scriptures were written to guide us to ſalvation, and that God always proportions the means to the end; it naturally follows, that the benefit of inſpiration was granted to the prophets and apoſtles in every point, which concerned religion, where their own abilities were inſufficient.

With reſpect to the manner in which the minds of the Prophets and Apoſtles were affected by Divine inſpiration, as we are favoured with nothing ſimilar at this day, we muſt receive our information entirely from the Scriptures, and can no farther rely upon our own conjectures, than as they are ſupported by their authority. But by the help of their information we may perceive a remarkable difference between the pretended prophets amongſt the Heathen and the ſervants

vants of the true God, both in the methods, which they made uſe of to procure the favour of Heaven, and the effects, which inſpiration was ſuppoſed to have upon their rational faculties. The prophets of Baal *cut themſelves with knives and lancers,* (1 Kings xviii. 28.) when they wanted to obtain his aſſiſtance; whereas Elijah invoked the aid of the God of Iſrael in a ſhort, humble, and rational addreſs, adapted to the capacity of all the people. The Heathens pretended to be worked to an enthuſiaſtic fury, when they foretold by inſpiration any future event, and that the words, which they uttered, were the immediate dictates of their god, and ſpoken without their own conſent or inclination. But the true prophets and apoſtles were left in full poſſeſſion of all their faculties; unleſs their mind was for a time oppreſſed by the ſplendour of a viſion, or their heart overcharged with grief at the proſpect of future calamities. Equability of temper was indeed ſo far neceſſary to receive the influence of the Spirit, that we find Eliſha (2 Kings iii. 15.) incapable of its operation, whilſt his

his mind was diſturbed even by virtuous anger againſt the king of Iſrael. The true prophets were commiſſioned and enabled to declare the will of God; but they were ſtill left at full liberty to obey or reſiſt the motions of the Spirit. Thus we find that Jonah attempted to flee from the preſence of the Lord, and did not perform his meſſage to the Ninevites, till he was terrified into repentance, and made ſenſible of his folly. And St. Paul informs us, that *the ſpirits of the prophets are ſubject to the prophets.* (1 Cor. xiv. 32.)

Whether the inſpiration of the Apoſtles was diſtinguiſhable by themſelves from the operation of their own minds, ſeems a queſtion of no importance; ſince they had abundant evidence of ſupernatural aſſiſtance from the improvement of their knowledge. They had hence a clear and conſiſtent view of the whole ſcheme of man's redemption. They were able to recollect all our Saviour's diſcourſes; many of which were imperfectly underſtood at the time of their delivery. They overcame their old prejudices. They coveted

coveted ſpiritual inſtead of temporal rewards; preached peace and benevolence, without aiming at conqueſt; and equally deſired the converſion and ſalvation of Jews and Gentiles. They had beſides, at the firſt deſcent of the Holy Ghoſt, an ocular demonſtration, that ſome ſuperior power operated to *give them a mouth and wiſdom, which all* their *adverſaries* ſhould *not be able to gainſay, nor reſiſt.* (Luke xxi. 15.) I proceed,

Secondly, to defend the hiſtory of the Old Teſtament from the charge of fiction or deluſion.

The hiſtory of the Old Teſtament is of all the ſacred writings the leaſt intimately connected with the doctrines of Chriſtianity, and may thence be repreſented as entirely detached. But as it is confeſſed to be written by Moſes and the prophets, as it was preſerved by the Jews amongſt their holy books, and affords us examples both of faith and practice, it deſerves a candid enquiry, what degree of ſupernatural aſſiſtance may be rea-

ſonably ſuppoſed to have been granted to the hiſtorical writers, and what credit is due to their own integrity and knowledge.

The inſpiration and credibility of the hiſtory of the Old Teſtament has been attacked by the adverſaries of chriſtianity with ridicule and contempt, in order to invalidate the reſt of the Scriptures; and the plain interpretation of it has been given up by ſome of its defenders, as not tenable in itſelf, and as if the truth of the hiſtory were no ways connected with the doctrines of religion. But though we meet in the Old Teſtament with many facts, which are only related to prevent a chaſm; yet we cannot admit without ſtrong proof, that the holy penmen would be ſuffered to mix falſhood with the truth. The whole Scriptures have been delivered down for centuries as cloſely connected with each other. We ſhould therefore be very careful not to diſcredit any part; unleſs its falſhood could be plainly proved, and its author be convicted of credulity or impoſture.

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The Moſaic account of the creation has been objected to by a late royal author *, as inconſiſtent with reaſon. "My reaſon "tells me," ſays the king, "that God ſees "all things, and that he is every where; "but the Scripture tells me, that God "ſearched for Adam in Paradiſe, and called "to him, Adam, where art thou?" If the Scripture in this paſſage ſuppoſed God to be ignorant of the place, where Adam was concealed, it would no leſs contradict itſelf than our reaſon; ſince the omniſcience and omnipreſence of God are emphatically declared by the ſacred writers. *Thou art about my path, and about my bed, and ſpieſt out all my ways. For lo, there is not a word in my tongue, but thou, O Lord, knoweſt it altogether. Whither ſhall I go then from thy ſpirit: or whither ſhall I go then from thy preſence? If I climb up into heaven, thou art there: if I go down to hell, thou art there alſo. If I take the wings of the morning, and remain in the uttermoſt parts of the ſea; even there alſo ſhall thy hand lead me, and*

* King of Pruſſia.

thy right hand ſhall hold me. If I ſay, peradventure the darkneſs ſhall cover me: then ſhall my night be turned to day. Yea, the darkneſs is no darkneſs with thee, but the night is as clear as the day: the darkneſs and light to thee are both alike. (Pſ. cxxxix. 2, 3, 6—11.) *Can any hide himſelf in ſecret places that I ſhall not ſee him? ſaith the Lord: do not I fill heaven and earth? ſaith the Lord.* (Jer. xxiii. 24.) Poſſibly thoſe, who ſo highly prize their own natural abilities, are indebted to thoſe very Scriptures, which they affect to deſpiſe, for the knowledge of ſuch ſublime truths. But Moſes no where ſays, that God ſearched for Adam. When he had tranſgreſſed by eating the forbidden fruit, he was ſummoned before his Maker, obliged to give an account of his guilt, and forced to condemn himſelf out of his own mouth.

To this and ſome other objections of equal weight, concerning the creation and the deluge, a defender of the Jewiſh and Chriſtian religions anſwers, by ſuppoſing them

them to be * "the ancient popular tradi-
"tions of the Jews, blended with allegorical
"and hieroglyphical imagery, in which it
"is neither very eaſy, nor very material
"to diſtinguiſh what is fabulous from what
"is true;" though he afterwards admits them to be "originally founded, like moſt "of the mythological fictions of the Greeks, "upon real and important facts." All this is eaſily aſſerted, but entirely deſtitute of proof. The Scripture accounts of the creation and the deluge are delivered by Moſes as a plain narrative of facts, and connected with a relation of the names and actions of the antediluvians, which cannot be perverted into allegory and hieroglyphic; but muſt either be true, or a collection of miſtakes and falſhoods. The Jews, who came into Egypt with only ſeventy perſons, had not time or leiſure to form any falſe traditions before Moſes, which might be called ancient. For the accounts delivered by Abraham, Iſaac, and Jacob certainly deſerve a more honourable appellation. Moſes alſo

* Eſſays, vol. ii. p. 197.

appears too wiſe a man to be impoſed upon by fables, and too religious to deceive poſterity by giving them a detail of important events without foundation, or an allegorical collection of unknown facts, which have never been explained. But if we ſuppoſe it a real hiſtory of the creation, deſtruction, and renovation of mankind, it is highly credible and conſiſtent in itſelf, and ſupported by authorities not to be denied by any chriſtian. The Moſaic account of the creation informs us, that in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth; that in ſix days he by his word reduced the earth into order, cauſed it to be inhabited by variety of animals, placed man in a ſtate of innocence at the head of the viſible world, and put him in poſſeſſion of happineſs upon the equitable condition of obeying one eaſy command; that man, at the inſtigation of our great enemy, rebelled againſt his benefactor, and was driven out of paradiſe, expoſed to all the evils, which at preſent abound. And what is there in all this inconſiſtent with reaſon, or the ſtate of the world?

world? Or where will the diſbelievers of this account furniſh us with a better from the records of antiquity, or the impartial dictates of ſound judgment? That God created the world needs no proof. That he made man at firſt happy and innocent is perfectly conſiſtent with our notions of his goodneſs. That diſobedience is a crime, and that the world abounds with miſery and evil, cannot be denied. And that man fell from his ſtate of innocence, and thus forfeited his happineſs, by his own fault, is more probable in itſelf, than any other account we can find of his preſent imperfection.

Many of theſe articles are mentioned again in other parts of Scripture, and thus confirmed by undeniable authority, being adduced as the foundation of moral and religious duties, or to explain the nature and progreſs of ſin. The obſervation of the ſabbath is declared by the mouth of God himſelf to be founded on the creation of the earth in ſix days. (Exod. xx. 11.) St. Paul

not only mentions the fact, that *the ſerpent through ſubtlety beguiled Eve,* (2 Cor. xi. 3.) as an example that chriſtians were in danger of corruption; but aſſigns it as one reaſon, why the woman is inferior, and ſhould be obedient to the man. (1 Tim. ii. 14.) The ſame Apoſtle likewiſe contraſts the fall of Adam with the redemption of Chriſt; *as in Adam all die; even ſo in Chriſt ſhall all be made alive.* (1 Cor. xv. 22.) And our Saviour forbids a man to put away his wife, becauſe in the beginning *God made* one *male,* and one *female.* (Mark x. 6.) The ſame doctrine St. Paul inculcates to correct the pride of the Athenians, when he tells them, that *God hath made of one blood all nations of men.* (Acts xvii. 26.) St. John alſo aſcribes the murder of Abel by Cain, to his envious ſpirit and wicked actions. (1 John iii. 12.) It is not therefore of ſmall importance, whether we believe or deny the truth of this hiſtory; ſince it is cloſely connected with the Jewiſh and Chriſtian doctrines. And it is moſt reaſonable to determine, that Chriſt and his Apoſtles, though they might ſpeak accord-

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ing to popular opinion in articles, which they did not profeſs to teach, fixed the duties of religion upon the rock of knowledge and truth, and not upon the fluctuating ſands of miſtake and falſhood.

And what do the improvements of modern philoſophy oppoſe to all this? A bare ſuppoſition, that evil is neceſſary to produce good. The Scriptures indeed repreſent temporal evil as ſometimes neceſſary to bring ſinners to repentance; and inform us, that final puniſhment will certainly await incorrigible ſinners. But it wants a reaſonable proof, inſtead of an aſſertion, that miſery is the direct cauſe of happineſs to ourſelves or others; or that God would not have exempted his obedient ſervants from every degree of infirmity and pain. If therefore we reject the Scripture account of the creation, we ſhall be left entirely ignorant, how the world was formed, and puzzled with vain conjectures about the origin of evil.

With reſpect to the deluge, the authority of

of Moſes is ſufficient to give credit to an account conſiſtent in itſelf, and where the cauſe aſſigned is adequate to the effect. That God is able to alter the laws of nature, or to deſtroy what he has eſtabliſhed, no one can deny, who allows his being and attributes. And that univerſal wickedneſs was a ſufficient provocation for ſuch a ſignal vengeance is not incredible to any one, who acknowledges, that God makes an eternal diſtinction between good and evil, and that he always loves the former, and abhors the latter.

If then the deluge was not a real fact, Moſes muſt either have been deceived himſelf, or have raſhly hazarded his reputation for veracity, by giving a circumſtantial account of an event, which had no firmer ground than popular opinion. But tradition alone in thoſe early ages would have prevented ſurmiſe and fiction from becoming univerſal in ſo few generations. Beſides it would have ill become the lawgiver, who forbad all ſlanders and falſe accuſations,

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to charge the whole world, except one family, with ſuch complete degeneracy, if they had been compoſed like other generations of a more equal mixture of the righteous and wicked. For though impiety and idolatry have frequently prevailed to a very great extent; yet the world has never ſince the flood been ſo totally corrupt. This hiſtory alſo ſtands uncontradicted by any ancient writer, and is confirmed both by St. Peter, who quotes it as an inſtance of God's diſtinguiſhing juſtice, (2 Pet. ii. 5.) and by our Lord, who compares the ſuddenneſs of his ſecond coming to the careleſs ſtate of the world in the days of Noe. (Matt. xxiv. 37.) On ſuch an important ſubject it is to the higheſt degree improbable, that they ſhould mention a tranſaction as an example and warning, if it never exiſted, but owed its belief to popular opinion.

The hiſtory of Sampſon is alſo given up as unimportant, and unconnected with the Chriſtian doctrines. But his prodigious ſtrength, when aſſerted by a credible author,

ſhould not be denied without poſitive teſtimony of its falſhood, or ſome proof of its impoſſibility. If we are reſolved to believe nothing, which is not agreeable to our own experience, our knowledge will be ſmall, and we ſhall frequently perceive that it has been very defective. From hiſtory, therefore, well authenticated, we derive much information, and we believe, doubt, or deny particular facts, as they are related by perſons of more or leſs credit, and appear probable and conſiſtent from the cauſes and motives, by which they were produced. Unleſs then we reject the whole hiſtory of the Old Teſtament, we muſt grant, that God frequently exerted a miraculous power in favour of his choſen people. This makes it perfectly credible, that he might raiſe up Sampſon to be a temporary deliverer, and that a perſon of ſuch ſtrength and courage might produce a ſlaughter, which is recorded as marvellous in the ſacred Scriptures.

The hiſtory of Balaam, though often attempted to be ridiculed, ſhews an inſtance of

of a conduct too common, a perſon ſtruggling to reconcile the immoderate love of riches with his duty, and to ſerve at once God and Mammon. The poſſibility of the miracle cannot be denied. And the propriety of it may be evident, if we attend to the plain circumſtances of the ſtory. The prophet, who came to the king of Moab with a full deſire to curſe the Iſraelites, was obliged to bleſs them three times, to foretel their proſperity whilſt they continued righteous, and to prevent any other from attempting to imitate his example, by his laſt ſolemn words, *Bleſſed is he that bleſſeth thee, and curſed is he that curſeth thee.* (Numb. xxiv. 9.) Moſes could not in this hiſtory follow popular tradition, becauſe it happened in his own time. And it is neither conſiſtent with his morality, that he ſhould eſtabliſh a fact by his teſtimony, which he did not know to be true; nor with his ſenſe, that he ſhould make himſelf liable to be convicted of falſhood.

If we then impartially examine the hiſtory

tory of the Old Teſtament, its authority would be much higher, from the credibility of the writers alone, than theſe vague objections ſeem to allow. The credit of an hiſtorian ariſes from his judgment, his deſire of ſpeaking the truth, and his opportunities of diſcovering the real ſtate and circumſtances of the facts, which he relates. Moſes and the prophets in all theſe reſpects have greatly the advantage of profane hiſtorians. Moſes is the moſt ancient of all writers; and even by the help of tradition might be informed with moral certainty of ſeveral leading facts, and thus guarded againſt the deluſions of fiction, and the abſurdities of popular opinion. He was inſtructed in all the learning of the Egyptians. He was far advanced in life before he was called to an important ſtation; and had ſpent forty years in the politeneſs of a court, and as many in the ſolitude of a private retirement. But though he had the experience, he was free from the infirmities of age; ſince after he had conducted and governed the children of Iſrael forty years more in the wilderneſs,

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he died in the full poſſeſſion of all his faculties; *his eye was not dim, nor his natural force abated.* (Deut. xxxiv. 7.) And his deſire of relating the truth is manifeſt from the candour, with which he recounts his own frailties, and the faults and tranſgreſſions of God's choſen people. The prophets likewiſe in general were pious and virtuous, and often eye-witneſſes of the facts, which they committed to writing. To this may be added, that the plainneſs, conciſeneſs, and connection of the ſtory contained in the Old Teſtament form a ſtrong internal evidence in favour of its truth. Whatever regards religion is related at full length; whilſt ſuch facts, as tended chiefly to gratify human intereſt or ambition, are either omitted, or inſerted only to connect the reſt. We may therefore conclude, that Moſes and the other hiſtorians were favoured with the ſpirit of wiſdom to ſelect proper facts; and it is not unreaſonable to believe, that their knowledge was increaſed by direct inſpiration, if the ordinary means of information were erroneous or deficient.

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The connection between Chriſtianity and the hiſtorical part of the Old Teſtament is alſo confirmed by our Saviour and his Apoſtles, who frequently enforce the duties of religion from the facts there recorded. In matters only mentioned by way of illuſtration in proverbs or parables, the ſacred writers may uſe words in the common acceptation, and allude to facts according to the received opinion, without examining whether they be philoſophically true, or adding the ſanction of their own authority. But in eſſential doctrines of religion, and truths which are delivered for our inſtruction, to ſuppoſe, that they taught or encouraged us to believe, what they neither knew nor believed themſelves, would be to repreſent our faith erroneous, defective, and inconſiſtent; and to leave us in ſuch a ſtate of uncertainty, and ſo much under the influence of our paſſions and imagination, as ſeems impoſſible in a revelation from a gracious God. I proceed,

Thirdly, to anſwer ſome objections to the

the doctrine, that the Apoſtles were aſſiſted by the ſpirit in thoſe writings, which were not prophetical.

We are told by a modern author, that "the notion is very erroneous, which is "in general maintained by the profeſſors "of Chriſtianity, that the ſacred writings "were compoſed under the immediate in-"fluence of divine inſpiration. This no-"tion," ſays he, "is highly improbable in "itſelf, plainly contradictory to the general "tenor of ſcripture, and wholly deſtitute of "proof, excepting ſuch as may be derived "from a groſs perverſion of a few detached "paſſages *." If this author would have us underſtand by the immediate influence of divine inſpiration, that every word was ſo directed by the Holy Spirit, that the Prophets and Apoſtles could have expreſſed the ſame meaning in no other phraſes, he charges the profeſſors of Chriſtianity with an opinion, which few of any knowledge have entertained. If he intends to allow

* Eſſays Hiſt. and Lit. vol. i. p. 110.

their inſpiration, as far as was neceſſary for the propagation of the ſublime truths of religion, the word *immediate* ſeems likely to miſlead the reader, and favour the objections of the infidel. For the effect and authority of every part of the canonical Scripture with regard to us is the ſame, whether the ſacred writers delivered the truth from their own knowledge, or had their deficiencies ſupplied from the immediate operation of the Holy Spirit; ſince thoſe parts, where the poſitive inſpiration of the Holy Ghoſt, not being neceſſary, was not vouchſafed, were written however under the controul and direction of the ſame unerring guide. The whole volume therefore carries the ſeal and ſtamp of omniſcience, as well where the Holy Spirit, ever preſent to aid thoſe whom he had previouſly moved to write, ſecured them from error in relating what they themſelves knew, as where they delivered the immediate dictates of Heaven. Let us then examine more particularly how this author ſupports his aſſertions. "The Apoſtles and Evangeliſts,"

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ſays he, " never pretended, like that great " impoſtor Mahomet, that their writings " were dictated by the angel Gabriel, or " ever urged the perfection of their own " compoſitions, as a deciſive proof of the " authenticity of the Chriſtian religion." We may grant, that the Apoſtles did not make uſe of the pretence of that impoſtor. They no where boaſt, like him, of the purity of their ſtyle, as ſurpaſſing all other writings. But this affords no proof, that they were not inſpired. *We ſpeak,* ſays St. Paul, *the wiſdom of God in a myſtery. We have received,* ſays he again in the ſame chapter, *not the ſpirit of the world, but the ſpirit which is of God; that we may know the things that are freely given to us of God. Which things alſo we ſpeak, not in the words which man's wiſdom teacheth. but which the Holy Ghoſt teacheth.* (1 Cor. xxvii. 12, 13.) " The teſtimony they gave to the truth of " Chriſtianity was" not therefore, as this author aſſerts, " to all intents a human teſ- " timony;" though we agree with him in his commendation of their fidelity, integrity,

and opportunity of knowing the truth. The aſſertion then of St. Paul, that *all Scripture is given by inſpiration of God,* (2 Tim. iii. 16.) the teſtimony of the ſame Apoſtle, that he *received not* the knowledge of *the goſpel of man, but by the revelation of Jeſus Chriſt,* (Gal. i. 12.) the declaration of St. Peter, that *holy men* of old *ſpake as they were moved by the Holy Ghoſt,* (2 Pet. i. 21.) and the promiſe of our Saviour, that *the ſpirit ſhould guide* the Apoſtles *into all truth,* (John xvi. 13.) prove without force or perverſion, that the Scriptures are to be obeyed in all precepts, believed in all their doctrines, and relied upon in every point that concerns religion.

Since then we have ſuch ſatisfactory proofs from the promiſe of Chriſt and the teſtimony of the ſacred writers, that they were aſſiſted by the Holy Spirit; let us draw our knowledge of religion from the Holy Scriptures in preference to the conjectures of fallible men, ſupported only by their own natural abilities or the maxims of

of philoſophy. The things of God cannot be learned without the help of the Scriptures; (1 Cor. ii. 24.) and every doctrine contradicted by them is to be rejected. (Gal. i. 8, 9.) But in them we may find a complete treaſure of heavenly wiſdom, and a full ſupply for all our infirmities; ſince they are *profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for inſtruction in righteouſneſs, that the man of God may be perfect, throughly furniſhed unto all good works.* (2 Tim. iii. 16, 17.

THE AUTHORITY OF THE SCRIPTURES.

JOHN XX. 31.

But theſe are written, that ye might believe that Jeſus is the Chriſt the Son of God, and that believing ye might have life through his name.

IF we conſider man as an accountable creature, it is neceſſary that he ſhould conform himſelf to ſome rule of action. And if we view him as a being, who is able by his conduct to increaſe or diminiſh his future happineſs, it is proper that he ſhould chuſe a true and ſufficient rule to direct his ways. The only guides, that we can follow, are our own inclinations ariſing from the impreſſions of our ſenſes, the dictates of our reaſon, the information of other men, whom we eſteem wiſer than ourſelves, and

the will of God revealed from heaven. The firſt alone would be uncertain as a rule; ſince our inclinations may be either innocent or blameable; conſiſtent with our duty, or ſeeking the gratification of our own appetites, without regard to the intereſt or happineſs of others. Reaſon indeed, if unprejudiced, can never approve what is vicious or unjuſt. But it may be defective; unable to diſcover certain doctrines, or to point out in all caſes, how we ought to reconcile our own intereſt with the good of our neighbour. And if we had no better guide, our unruly paſſions would predominate by degrees, and obſcure the light of our nobler faculties. Much the ſame may be ſaid of the information of others. As all men are naturally fallible, we might harden ourſelves under that pretence againſt unwelcome truths, and refuſe to hear the voice of the charmer, charm he never ſo wiſely. And as we are never quite certain of their integrity; it requires a previous examination of their motives and principles before they can be truſted. And after all we may be deceived

ceived by adopting their miſtakes. The only foundation, therefore, upon which we can build ſecurely, is Divine Revelation. This, though communicated through veſſels of clay, proceeds from an unerring and benevolent author. And as this revelation is only contained in the Holy Scriptures, I ſhall in my following diſcourſe,

Firſt, ſhew that their authority is ſupreme and deciſive in all religious queſtions. And,

Secondly, that it is uniform in every article neceſſary to ſalvation.

Firſt, I am to ſhew, that the authority of the Scriptures is ſupreme and deciſive in all religious queſtions.

As our Saviour, by the confeſſion even of thoſe who deny his divinity and atonement, came to teach mankind the will of God; and as he ſent his Apoſtles for the ſame purpoſe, and by virtue of the ſame commiſſion, we can apply to no other with

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ſo great a probability of ſucceſs, if we deſire to learn the words of eternal life. If then we grant, that they had heavenly aſſiſtance, we muſt allow the books of Scripture all the authority, which is claimed by their writers; ſince otherwiſe we ſhould accuſe the Prophets and Apoſtles of falſely pretending to a divine commiſſion, or ſuppoſe them ignorant of the nature and extent of their meſſage, when it is not denied, that they were ſent by God.

The authority therefore of the Scriptures is ſupreme and deciſive to command our faith and obedience, as far as they claim the concurrence of God, and are intended to inſtruct us in the nature and properties of the ſubject, concerning which they diſcourſe. Their deſign is to ſhew us the way to everlaſting happineſs. Whatever therefore directly and neceſſarily conduces to that end, we expect to ſee explained with all the clearneſs and preciſion, which are poſſible in this ſtate of weakneſs and probation. By the ſame rule every other ſubject

ject will be treated with proportionable accuracy, as it is more or leſs connected with virtue and religion. Thus the different parts of Scripture are in ſome meaſure to be interpreted by different rules. Though it would derogate too much from the credit of their writers, and the honour of that Being, whoſe will they are ſuppoſed to declare, to imagine any part of them falſe or fabulous; the fruits of raſh conjecture, or the creature of a fanciful and weak imagination.

But though the Scriptures are intended to ſhew us the way to everlaſting life; yet they are not confined to a mere detail of moral duties. We have in them a valuable, conciſe, and uſeful hiſtory of the moſt ancient times, maxims of prudence with reſpect to our temporal happineſs, a chain of prophecies to gain credit to the authors, doctrines of the divine attributes and other ſpiritual ſubjects, which could only be known perfectly by a revelation from heaven, and religious precepts of piety and morality,

morality, which correct our vicious appetites, inſtruct our weak reaſon, and are to be obeyed without murmuring or diſpute. Theſe articles are not indeed treated ſo diſtinctly, that thoſe books, which are chiefly compoſed of one ſubject, contain nothing of the other. From hence we may form a probable argument, that being ſo frequently intermixed, no part is entirely excluded from the divine direction, though ſome may ſtand in little need of ſupernatural aſſiſtance. Let us therefore conſider ſeparately each part, and ſee what authority thoſe will allow, who defend Chriſtianity upon a limited plan, and what we may really attribute to it, by the dictates of reaſon, and the teſtimony of ſcripture.

The authority of the hiſtorical books muſt be ſufficient to anſwer the ends, which were intended by God and their reſpective writers. They were deſigned in general to ſet before us the method of his dealing with his choſen ſervants, the Iſraelites, who were rewarded or puniſhed, even in this life,

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in a peculiar manner; to ſhew how he interfered with the reſt of the world upon extraordinary occaſions; and to give an impartial account of the principal perſons, who as Iſraelites or anceſtors were connected with our Saviour. God has informed us in the law and the goſpel, that he loves virtue, and hates vice. And as he choſe the ſeed of Abraham, for his faith and piety, to be his peculiar people; he has ſhewed us in this world by their proſperity and afflictions, what will be the event of our good or evil conduct. When they truſted on the Lord, and obeyed his laws, they were victorious over all their enemies, *five of them could chaſe an hundred, and an hundred put ten thouſand to flight.* (Lev. xxvi. 8.) When they were tempted to follow the idolatry and corruptions of their neighbours, they were ſold into the hand of the heathen, they were conquered by inferior forces, and brought into the loweſt ſtate through *oppreſſion, plague, and trouble.* (Pſ. cvii. 39.) But even in this ſituation, when their own arm could be of no ſervice, if they cried unto the Lord,

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and repented of their ſins, he raiſed them up deliverers, and often reſtored them by a ſingle victory to their former eaſe and plenty. The deſtruction of the whole race of ſinners by the deluge, the overthrow of Sodom and Gomorrah by fire from heaven, the conqueſt of wicked kingdoms, and the pardon of the Ninevites, prove the watchful eye and powerful arm of providence; that there is no ſafety in a courſe of ſin, and that though God is long-ſuffering, and commonly gives ſpace for repentance and amendment, yet it will not at laſt be well with the wicked. But perhaps the greateſt uſe of the hiſtorical part of the Old Teſtament is to excite us to emulate the virtues, by which the patriarchs and other ſaints were eminently diſtinguiſhed. The faith of Abraham, the patience of Job, the chaſtity of Joſeph, the zeal of David, and all the other inſtances of virtue recorded in thoſe ſacred books, ought to fill us with ſhame, if, aſſiſted with ſuperior light, we do not ſtrive to merit God's favour by the practice of that abſtinence and obedience, which they performed,

formed, who only beheld their reward in types and ſhadows. But as perfection does not belong to mere man, we muſt eſtimate the goodneſs of their particular actions by their conformity to the written law; and when we read of their faults and miſcarriages, ſhould take greater care, leſt we alſo be ſurpriſed into ſin, which we here ſee could ſometimes prevail over perſons of ſuch faith, zeal, and diligence. And if at any time we unhappily imitate their failings, let us alſo imitate that ſincere contrition, of which we have ſo many proofs in the caſe of David; and which we may believe was felt by the reſt, whenever they were conſcious of any offence. But above all others the example of our Saviour in the New Teſtament moſt profitably calls for our ſtudy and imitation. He alone could challenge his enemies, *Which of you convinceth me of ſin?* (John viii. 46.) and all his diſpoſitions were perfectly pure, and conſtantly devoted to the will of his heavenly Father. It muſt therefore greatly tend to exalt our virtue, and preſerve us from temptations, if we carefully

carefully obſerve, and ſtrive to imitate his zeal, meekneſs, patience, and above all his benevolence, which he recommended and enjoined, as the characteriſtic mark of his true diſciples.

Another part of the Scriptures conſiſts of prudential maxims, and recommendations of virtue from its good influence upon our temporal happineſs. *Godlineſs*, ſays St. Paul, *is profitable unto all things, having promiſe of the life that now is.* (1 Tim. iv. 8.) But we are not to conclude from the uſe of theſe arguments, that the authors were ignorant of a ſtate of future retribution. From the law of Moſes they had the promiſe of temporal proſperity, and from the covenant with Abraham they had the expectation of the Meſſiah, who was to reward the patience and faith of the patriarchs, to purify the houſe of Iſrael, and in whom all the families of the earth were to be bleſſed. And therefore the Apoſtle adds, *of that which is to come.*

Another

Another part of the ſacred Scriptures conſiſts of the writings of the prophets, who were ſent to foretel future events, to mark the character of the Meſſiah, that it might not be ſucceſsfully imitated, or even fully attempted by any impoſtor, to warn the people to avoid the divine judgments prepared for their ſins, and exhort them to repentance, and more ſtrict obſervance of their duty. We may remark upon theſe, that the exhortations and directions are of equal importance with the prophecies, and in conſequence equally to be aſcribed to the ſuperintendance of God, and equally ſanctioned by divine authority. For though the prophets were utterly incapable, by reaſon alone, to foretel what was to come to paſs in diſtant generations, and might explain by their natural abilities the duties of the moral law; yet in caſes of almoſt univerſal degeneracy, it required ſupernatural aſſiſtance, to point out the moſt dangerous tranſgreſſions, to ſettle the bounds of their duty, and to avoid being led aſtray by popular opinions. The office of a prophet with

reſpect to exhortation often requires gifts not neceſſary to a common teacher; ſince the latter is guided by a rule, which he acknowledges to be of greater authority than the dictates of his own learning, experience, and wiſdom. When God ſends a meſſage to mankind, either of information or warning, we muſt ſuppoſe the meſſenger ſufficiently inſtructed to deliver it without miſtakes. And if we grant, that it contains the will of God, it immediately claims our perfect obedience, and the queſtion how much of it abſolutely required immediate inſpiration, independent of man's natural faculties, becomes vain and uſeleſs. Inſpiration is intended to render the weak man perfect, the ignorant wiſe, and to prevent all poſſibility of error in religious truths. This infallibility in heavenly doctrines is very conſiſtent with natural infirmities in the common affairs of life. But leſs than this ſeems incompatible with any notion of divine revelation.

The doctrines and precepts of the Chriſtian

tian religion, with the hiſtory of our Saviour's miniſtry and the firſt publication of the goſpel, are faithfully recorded in the books of the New Teſtament. In them only can we find an original account of the life and actions, the parables and other diſcourſes of our Saviour, and the doctrines of the apoſtles delivered in their own words. The authority of theſe books muſt depend upon the natural abilities and fidelity of the writers, and the aids to their imperfections, which they received from above. They were eye-witneſſes of the facts of our Saviour's life, their diſpoſitions were ſincere and devoted to religion, and they had the promiſe of our Lord, that he would ſend the ſpirit to their aſſiſtance, *which ſhould guide them into all truth.* (John xvi. 13.) The religion, which our Saviour had propoſed to the Jews moſtly in parables, they explained in language as clear as the nature of the ſubject will admit; and thereby proved that their minds were filled with heavenly wiſdom. The epiſtles contain many ſublime doctrines, much reaſoning

upon the attributes and ways of God, numerous precepts to regulate our conduct, and ſalutary cautions to avoid thoſe errors, which ſprang up even in the time of the Apoſtles, and infeſted the firſt ages of the Chriſtian church. Theſe epiſtles however, though acknowledged by an author of ſome late Eſſays * to be of "apoſtolical autho-"rity, and to breathe a truly chriſtian and "evangelical ſpirit," are denied by him in general to be binding upon our faith. "Nothing," ſays he †, "but the prophecies "contained in thoſe writings, together with "a few paſſages profeſſedly penned from "immediate inſpiration, appear to be, ſtrictly "ſpeaking, of divine authority." The obſcurity of the words, *ſtrictly ſpeaking*, is here blameable. They ſeem to grant, that the writings of the Apoſtles are not to be looked upon as merely human; and yet leave their authority uncertain, to be heightened or lowered, as may beſt ſuit the preſent purpoſe. The prophecies are allowed to proceed from inſpiration, becauſe they were

* Eſſay 22. † P. 421, or 2.

impoſ-

impoſſible to be conceived by man without divine aſſiſtance. Some doctrines likewiſe contained in the epiſtles equally exceed the powers of human nature; and muſt therefore claim the ſame original, or be looked upon as raſh conjectures, or falſe opinions. But it is farther objected, that all the epiſtles were of "an occaſional nature, written "at different times, to different ſocieties of "chriſtians, upon different emergencies." Many of the precepts are of a general nature, and equally concern all chriſtians. The neceſſity of charity, as the grand principle of our actions, obliges us as ſtrictly, as it did the Corinthians. And the relative duties ought as much to be practiſed in theſe days, as in the time of the Apoſtles. The faith and duty of all chriſtians are in general the ſame; though they may be occaſionally placed in very different ſituations, and conſequently called upon to exerciſe different virtues, or undergo different trials. "But," ſays he further, "the wri-"ters certainly do not arrogate to themſelves "that plenary degree of inſpiration, they do

" not exact that blind and implicit acqui-
" eſcence, which is at preſent generally
" conceived eſſential." St. Paul aſſerts, that *all Scripture is given by inſpiration of God,* (2 Tim. iii. 16.) which cannot well be underſtood in a lower degree, than as far as religion is concerned, and as far as our infirmities would lead us into miſtakes. And when, in the ſeventh chapter of his Firſt Epiſtle to the Corinthians, he diſtinguiſhes with ſo much care between the inſpired commands of our Lord, and his own private judgment, which he thought at the ſame time conformable to the Divine will, (1 Cor. vii. 40.) we have the ſtrongeſt preſumption, that he meant to ſtamp all the other parts of the epiſtles, which delivered doctrines or precepts, with divine authority. The apoſtles never indeed exacted a *blind* acquieſcence; nor did they deſire an *implicit* confidence without conſideration. We are at full liberty to examine with candour the grounds and evidence of chriſtianity; though it is at our own peril, if we ſuffer our prejudices or evil affections to impoſe upon our judg-

judgment, and miſlead us to reject religious truth. But St. Paul was ſo certain of his doctrine, that he pronounced an anathema even againſt himſelf or an angel from heaven, which ſhould *preach any other goſpel*; (Gal. i. 8.) and he commended the Theſſalonians, that *they received the word, which they heard of him, not as the word of men, but (as it is in truth) the word of God.* (1 Theſſ. ii. 13.) From his character alſo we may juſtly conclude, that he endeavoured to write the ſame doctrines, which he preached. The aſſiſtance therefore of the ſpirit would be equally neceſſary, when he inſtructed his converts by letter, as by word. Some part of the epiſtles may be needleſs to us, if we be not in danger of the ſame falſe doctrines, which were then taught. But as hereſies may revive in diſtant times, if ever we are in the ſame circumſtances, the epiſtles are as applicable and uſeful to us, as they were to thoſe churches, to whom they were firſt addreſſed. Every part of the Scripture is not neceſſary in all times, or to all perſons. But as we are certain, that its writers were the pro-

In the mediation and redemption of Chriſt there is likewiſe no diſagreement amongſt the ſacred writers. For though ſeveral diſtinct acts, which Chriſt was to do and ſuffer, are foretold in different paſſages, and ſome in ſuch a manner, as to ſeem ſcarce compatible before the event; yet we ſee them all ſo completely fulfilled in the goſpel, that no contradiction can now be pretended between the ſeveral accounts of our Lord's office.

The authority of the Scriptures is likewiſe uniform in exhorting us to repentance of our evil deeds, and the performance of every virtue upon the nobleſt and pureſt principles. The Iſraelites were commanded in the law to love their neighbours, and aſſiſt their enemies. (Lev. xix. 18. Exod. xxiii. 4, 5.) And our Saviour makes love the root of our duty, and extends its branches to every act of uſeful benevolence. There is no good action forbidden or diſcouraged by any of his apoſtles; nor any evil principle favoured or allowed. St. Paul obſerves,

obſerves, (Rom. xiii. 10.) that *love is the fulfilling of the law*, becauſe it *worketh no ill to its neighbour*. St. James (ii. 15, 16.) exhorts to charity, and ſhews how fruitleſs are the beſt wiſhes without ſuitable deeds. St. Peter commands us (1 Pet. ii. 1.) to lay aſide all malice, and guile, and hypocriſy. And St. John, the beloved diſciple of our Lord, employs the greateſt part of his general epiſtle in pointing out the benefits we have received from the love of God, and the returns we ought to make to our brethren in imitation of this example.

It may here be obſerved, that it does not impeach the uniformity of the Scriptures in point of doctrine and authority, that diſputes aroſe very early in the primitive church, that the Apoſtles ſometimes differed in inclination, and that their private conduct might in ſome few inſtances deſerve rebuke. Hereſies began to ſpring up from men's prejudices in the time of the Apoſtles. But we are not thence to conclude, without proof, that their writings, properly under-

underſtood, afforded any real occaſion for difference of opinion. As the office of the Apoſtles ſtill left them men of like paſſions with us, and the Chriſtian religion was only meant to check or change our diſpoſitions, where they were prone to evil and diſobedience, they were liable to variety of inclinations, and might purſue different means to obtain the ſame end, when the queſtion did not concern the eſſentials of chriſtianity. And though the Apoſtles were ſecure from all danger of miſtakes in their doctrine; yet being equally obliged with their hearers to obey the precepts of the goſpel, it required care to withſtand temptations, and to keep themſelves free from the ſnares of their ſpiritual enemy. As indeed their knowledge was perfect, and they had weaned themſelves from the pleaſures, honours, and riches of this world, hoping for their reward in a future life; and as they had the example of our Saviour always before their eyes, and were filled with the moſt ardent affection for his perſon, and zeal for his ſervice, we may expect to find them eminent in every virtue.

virtue. But ſtill they were not free from infirmities, and every action of their lives was not to be copied or commended without limitation. When therefore St. Paul reproved St. Peter (Gal. ii. 14.) for ſeeming afraid of the cenſure of men, we cannot conclude, that they differed about the nature or extent of our faith, or that St. Peter was not ſenſible of the liberty of the goſpel.

A difference of doctrine has often been alledged between St. Paul, who attributes juſtification to faith only, and St. James, who inſiſts ſtrongly upon the neceſſity of good works to complete the ſame end. St. Paul denies, that our own works alone could render any man acceptable in the ſight of God; and produces the inſtance of Abraham, who *believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteouſneſs,* (Gen. xv. 6.) to prove, that *a man is juſtified by faith without the deeds of the law.* (Rom. iv. 3. iii. 28.) St. James aſſerts, (ii. 17.) that *faith is dead being alone,* and that good works are neceſſary, whenever we have opportunity, to

prove

prove that we are guided by a right principle. But theſe accounts of juſtification, when duly examined, will be found to contain no contradiction. The two Apoſtles may be conſidered as viewing the ſame ſubject in a different, though conſiſtent light; and the doctrine of St. James will only prevent men from drawing falſe concluſions from the words of St. Paul. The latter indeed not only excludes the works of the ceremonial law from having ſufficient merit in themſelves to procure our pardon and acceptance; but concludes the Gentiles alſo under ſin, who truſted to ſuch righteouſneſs, as could ariſe from a ſtrict obſervation of the precepts of morality. (Rom. iii. 9.) But the Apoſtle obſerves, that juſtification in the ſight of God cannot proceed from any thing, that can be performed by an imperfect creature. For *not by works of righteouſneſs which we have done, but according to his mercy he ſaved us.* (Tit. iii. 5.) St. Paul therefore declares, that faith in God's promiſes, and conſequently in Chriſt, in whom thoſe promiſes were fulfilled, is the ſole principle

principle of juſtification. But as good works, being thus denied to be ſufficient of themſelves to convey real merit, might eaſily be miſrepreſented as totally ſuperfluous, St. James inſiſts upon their neceſſity to perfect our faith, and prove the ſincerity of our diſpoſitions. *If a brother or ſiſter be naked, and deſtitute of daily food; and one of you ſay unto them, Depart in peace, be you warmed, and filled: notwithſtanding ye give them not thoſe things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit?* (James ii. 15, 16.) But St. Paul gives no encouragement to any kind of licentiouſneſs. He exhorts his converts *not to continue in ſin, that grace may abound.* (Rom. vi. 1, 2.) *He kept under his body, and brought it into ſubjection.* (1 Cor. ix. 27.) *He exerciſed himſelf to have always a conſcience void of offence toward God, and toward men.* (Acts xxiv. 16.) He recommends a perpetual meditation upon *whatſoever things are juſt, whatſoever things are pure.* (Phil. iv. 8.) He frequently inſiſts upon the relative duties. And in his Epiſtle to Titus he gives him this

this charge: *Theſe things I will that thou affirm conſtantly, that they which have believed in God, might be careful to maintain good works.* (Tit. iii. 8.) And St. James is ſo far from declaring, that works alone will procure us ſalvation, that he reſts the merits of his own good works entirely upon their union with the chriſtian faith; *Shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will ſhew thee my faith by my works.* (Ja. ii. 18.) Each Apoſtle therefore agrees, that faith and works are both neceſſary to conſtitute a perfect chriſtian, and that we are juſtified by *faith, which worketh by love.* (Gal. v. 6.)

From this view of the Scripture we may learn, that its deſign is to make us wiſe unto everlaſting life. We muſt therefore conclude, that every religious doctrine may be there found with certainty, and that every part is entitled to that credit and authority, which are due to a book publiſhed by the prophets of God. And theſe cannot amount to leſs than belief of its truth, and obedience to its precepts.

ANSWER TO OBJECTIONS AGAINST CHRIST'S ATONEMENT.

1 JOHN ii. 1, 2.

If any man ſin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jeſus Chriſt the righteous: and he is the propitiation for our ſins: and not for our ſins only, but alſo for the ſins of the whole world.

HAVING in my former diſcourſes conſidered the truth, inſpiration, and authority of the Scriptures, I proceed now to examine the end or deſign, for which they were written, which is to inſtruct and guide us in the way to ſalvation. If we had continued able by our own faculties to perform the will of God, it would have been ſufficient to inform us what we had to do, and ſet before us the motives to the performance. But as we are naturally in a

fallen ſtate, which tends ſtrongly to blind our eyes, and corrupt our hearts; it is neceſſary, that we ſhould be likewiſe inſtructed, where to apply for ſufficient aſſiſtance; and uſeful to know, to whom we are indebted for our reſtoration to the favour of God, even in thoſe particulars, in which our co-operation was unneceſſary and impoſſible. Our love to God ought to be increaſed, when we learn, that by his mercy we are recalled from death unto life. And we may with more confidence run the race, that is ſet before us, when we are informed, that our Saviour has diſcharged that debt, which we were unable to pay, and redeemed us from the ſlavery of ſin, and the power of the grave. Accordingly the Scripture uniformly points out the Meſſiah, as the object of the promiſes and types of the law, the perſon in whoſe *teſtimony was the ſpirit of prophecy*, (Rev. xix. 10.) and the captain of our ſalvation, by whoſe ſtripes we are healed. This faith ſeems to have been univerſally received by all, who admitted the fact of our Lord's crucifixion. But this doctrine of our

Saviour's

Saviour's atonement has lately been ranked amongſt the early corruptions of chriſtianity. We grant, that many hereſies began very early in the church, and that our great enemy not only ſowed tares in the time of the Apoſtles, but often found fit ground to bring them to perfection. But as numbers of chriſtians adhered for many ages to the truth of the goſpel; it is not ſufficient to aſſert, that an eſtabliſhed doctrine is a corruption, becauſe many perſons are of a contrary opinion, unleſs it can be fairly proved to have no foundation in the Scriptures. Let us not then be induced by the greateſt pretenſions to ſuperior knowledge, or the utmoſt confidence of dictatorial language, to miſtake innovation for improvement, or to imagine that novelty in itſelf has any ſuperiority over eſtabliſhed belief. I ſhall therefore in my two following diſcourſes,

Firſt, examine the objections, which have been made to the eſtabliſhed belief, that the death of Chriſt was a proper ſacrifice for the ſins of mankind.

Secondly, ſhew how ſtrongly this doctrine is taught in the Holy Scriptures.

Thirdly, point out what uſe we may make of the knowledge of this truth, to confirm our faith, and improve our practice.

Firſt, I am to examine the objections, which have been made to the eſtabliſhed belief, that the death of Chriſt was a proper ſacrifice for the ſins of mankind.

Our adverſary * objects to the eſtabliſhed belief, "that it debaſes the doctrine of "the natural placability of the divine Be-"ing, and our ideas of the equity of his "government." The placability of the divine Being is ſufficiently manifeſt in the doctrine of atonement, as this myſtery was planned by himſelf, and the ſacrifice of our Redeemer proceeded from his bounty. *God*, ſays St. John, (iii. 16.) *ſo loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son.* And if we try the divine pro-

* Dr. Prieſtley. Corrupt. of Chriſtianity, vol. i. p. 152, &c.

ceedings

ceedings by our ideas of equity, as an adequate rule without reſpect to his revelation, we ſhall frequently be in danger of forming erroneous concluſions. *For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, ſaith the Lord.* (Iſ. lv. 8.) We muſt therefore, upon this, and all other religious queſtions, endeavour to find out the doctrine of Scripture, and ſubmit without diſpute to its authority.

It is farther urged againſt the doctrine of atonement, "that the principle, upon "which it is founded, is not mentioned in "the Scriptures; that it is only deduced "by inference; that the declarations of "God's mercy contain no ſuch limitation; "that it was never noticed by the patri-"archs and prophets; and that the Jews "upon this ſuppoſition would have expected "a ſuffering, and not a triumphant Meſſiah." In anſwer to theſe objections it may be obſerved, that if the fact be clearly revealed, we are bound to believe it, whether the reaſon of the diſpenſation be declared, or

not. An inference drawn directly from any clear text is a juſt foundation for an article of faith. But Chriſt is alſo ſaid in expreſs terms to have been the propitiation for our ſins, beſides many metaphorical expreſſions of the ſame import. The patriarchs and prophets might believe in a Redeemer; though they did not mention it on every occaſion. We are told, that Abraham rejoiced to ſee our Saviour's day. And the doctrine of ſacrifice for ſin was a ſignificant type of *the lamb* of God *ſlain from the foundation of the world.* (Rev. xiii. 8.) God may be ſaid freely to pardon our iniquities, when he pardons us not for works of righteouſneſs that we have done, but for his own mercy in Jeſus Chriſt. We cannot therefore conclude, that God would pardon ſinners upon repentance alone, without the merits and mediation of a Redeemer; nor can we ſafely rely upon an argument drawn from the opinions of the Jews and Heathens, the former of whom expected a triumphant, and not a ſuffering Meſſiah, and the latter reſted with confidence upon their own virtue.

tue. That the Jews in the time of our Saviour ſhould entertain wrong notions of the nature of his kingdom, is not wonderful, as their minds were too much attached to worldly pomp and riches, and they expected the bleſſings of God to be confined to their religion. St. Paul proves, (Rom. iii. 9. Gal. iii. 22.) that both Jews and Gentiles were under ſin by the ceremonial and natural law, and could only hope for juſtification by faith in Chriſt Jeſus. The terms of our ſalvation were only figured out in the Old Teſtament under types and ſhadows. It is therefore an uncertain method of arguing to determine by our own reaſon the method of God's counſels, and reſiſt the evidence of every text of Scripture, that does not accord with the manner, which we chuſe to preſcribe. The opinions of the Jews are of little importance. But, ſince our Saviour's crucifixion, even they have ſo far opened their eyes to the true meaning of the prophecies, that they have ſuppoſed there will be a ſuffering, as well as a triumphant Meſſiah; though there never was any reaſon

to imagine, that God would ſend two Chriſts; and we are aſſured, that the ſame Jeſus, who was crucified, and aſcended in glory, will ſo come in like manner, as he was ſeen to go into heaven. (Acts i. 11.)

The whole force of this objection from the ſilence of the Scriptures reſts upon two aſſertions *, that "the ſacred writers, though "they often ſpeak of the malignant nature "of ſin, never go a ſingle ſtep farther, and "aſſert, that God cannot pardon it without "an adequate ſatisfaction being made to his "juſtice, and the honour of his laws and "government;" and that "the contrary "ſentiment occurs every where, that repen-"tance and a good life are, *of themſelves*, "ſufficient to recommend us to the divine "favour." If a doctrine be taught in Scripture, in plain words, or by direct inference, it does not become falſe, or unneceſſary to be believed, becauſe the principle is not laid down in ſuch words, as are dictated by human underſtanding. This would plunge us

* Page 155, l. 17.

into

into perpetual doubt. We ſhould be inclined to believe a doctrine, becauſe it ſeems to be affirmed by ſome of the ſacred writers, and be perſuaded to reject the ſame, becauſe it is not mentioned upon other occaſions. The ſacred writers do not barely mention the malignant nature of ſin; but add likewiſe the purity of God, and the miſſion of Jeſus Chriſt. That repentance and a good life are *of themſelves* ſufficient to procure God's favour, is neither to be found in the Holy Scriptures in expreſs words, nor by direct inference. They are undoubtedly neceſſary to perfect our holineſs. But faith in Chriſt is ſhadowed out in the Old Teſtament, and revealed in the New, as the means of juſtification. When God calls upon his people to forſake their iniquities and idolatries, *Return unto me, and I will return unto you*; he not only exhorts them to amend their lives, but to return to his protection, to truſt in the promiſes of the covenant made with Abraham, and to obey the law given by Moſes. "All the declarations of "divine mercy" cannot juſtly be ſaid "to

"be

" be made without reſerve or limitation to " the truly penitent, through all the books " of Scripture, without the moſt diſtant hint " of any regard being had to the ſufferings " or merit of any being whatever;" when the croſs of Chriſt is ſo often mentioned in the New Teſtament; and we are ſaid to be *waſhed from our ſins in his blood*, (Rev. i. 5.) and ſaved *by the baptiſm of repentance.* (Mark i. 4. Luke iii. 3.) A declaration of God upon any particular occaſion is ſeldom ſo extenſive, or contains ſuch a complete detail of his will, that we may neglect the reſt of the revelation, and diſbelieve every article not expreſsly mentioned. Wherever there is a known law or conſtitution, every declaration has reference to it; and all its promiſes, threatenings, exhortations, and warnings are to be underſtood according to the terms of the covenant, under which men live. Thus when the Lord paſſed by before Moſes, and proclaimed his own attributes, *The Lord, the Lord God, merciful, and gracious, long-ſuffering, and abundant in goodneſs and truth, keeping mercy for thouſands, forgiving*

ing iniquity, and tranſgreſſion, and ſin, and that will by no means clear the guilty, (Exod. xxxiv. 6, 7.) he did not declare in theſe words, that he would have no reſpect to the merit and ſufferings of his beloved Son, whom he purpoſed hereafter to ſend into the world. The conditions of his forgiveneſs are not here mentioned; the paſſage being equally ſilent as to repentance, as it is with reſpect to faith. It is only ſaid, that God is merciful and gracious, that is, to the obedient; and by no means ſparing the guilty, that is, the diſobedient. But who are to be accounted objects of mercy or wrath, muſt depend upon other parts of Scripture, which more fully declare the laws of God and the means of acceptance. It is alſo urged, that "we certainly could not be "ſaid to be juſtified *freely*, if the favour "had been procured by the ſuffering of ano-"ther perſon." (Rom. iii. 24. Tit. iii. 7.) But as the whole text is, *being juſtified freely by his grace, through the redemption that is in Chriſt Jeſus*; (Rom. iii. 24.) the act of another perſon is certainly declared to contribute

bute to our juſtification, though the grace of God is given *freely* in oppoſition to our own merits. *After that the kindneſs and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared, not by works of righteouſneſs which we have done, but according to his mercy he ſaved us by the waſhing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghoſt; which he ſhed on us abundantly through Jeſus Chriſt our Saviour; that being juſtified by his grace we ſhould be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.* (Tit. iii. 4—7.)

In like manner, when David applies to the mercy of God in the twenty-fifth Pſalm, the motives, which ſhould induce God to forgive, are not fully mentioned. If his ſilence concerning redemption by the death of Chriſt be urged as a proof of his want of faith, the ſame argument might be uſed againſt the neceſſity of repentance or amendment. And if David and all the patriarchs knew, and the reſt of the Jews might have known, that God had entered into a covenant with Abraham to bleſs the world by the

the coming of the Meſſiah, they might truſt to the promiſes of God, and rely upon his mercy according to thoſe promiſes, though they did not ſee with the ſame clearneſs, that we do, the ſcheme of God's providence, and the terms of our ſalvation. The doctrine therefore of the atonement does not make the Old Teſtament *an unaccountable book*; ſince the Jews looked forward to the ſame Meſſiah, whom we acknowledge to have come at the appointed time. (Acts xxvi. 6, 7.) And whenever Job, Hezekiah, or others, plead their integrity, it may beſt be underſtood to mean their ſincerity in wiſhing to fulfil the law of God in obedience to the terms of his covenant. And in this ſenſe a chriſtian may ſtrive after perfection, whilſt he relies upon the merits and mediation of Chriſt to procure his pardon.

That we ſhould forgive others as we hope to be forgiven ourſelves, is next brought as an argument againſt this doctrine. It is certain, that we are bound to forgive our brother, as it is here urged, upon his repentance,

tance, without any atonement. But it by no means follows, though it is called a neceſſary concluſion, that the Divine Being acts towards us upon the ſame maxim. The caſes are ſo widely different, that no concluſion can be drawn from the conduct required of man, to determine the method of the Divine mercy, which flows ſpontaneouſly from God's benevolence and compaſſion. The offences of man againſt man are the offences of one fellow creature, the offspring of the ſame parents, againſt another. But our ſins againſt God include the guilt of rebellion againſt our maker, and ingratitude to our greateſt benefactor. We are commanded therefore to forgive, as we hope to be forgiven. But upon what conditions God will forgive us we muſt learn from his own revelation, and not from any ſuppoſed analogy of motives drawn by our own reaſon in ſuch different caſes.

It is aſſerted *, that "the parables, by "which our Lord repreſents the forgiving

* Page 159, l. 11.

"mercy

" mercy of God, are the fartheſt poſſible " from being calculated to give us an idea " of his requiring any thing more than " merely repentance on the part of the of- " fender." The deſign of the parable of the prodigal ſon, and the maſter who forgave the thouſand talents, with others of the ſame kind, is to ſhew the infinite mercy of God, the efficacy of repentance, and the neceſſity of imitating the divine compaſſion. Nothing more is required of the offender than faith and repentance, becauſe nothing more is in his power. But a parable, which is intended to ſhew what we are to do to obtain forgiveneſs, does not deny that ſomething may be done for us by a ſpotleſs mediator, which we ſinful creatures were unable to perform ourſelves. The doctrine therefore of atonement remains to be decided by other texts of ſcripture. If it be no where declared in words ſufficiently plain, it ought not to be believed. But if it be revealed by any inſpired writer, it would be wrong to reject it under the pretence, that it

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is not ſhadowed out in parables, where it was not the object.

It is true, that our Lord did not tell his Apoſtles, when they were in ſorrow at his approaching death, in thoſe very words, that "he muſt die in order to procure the "pardon of their ſins." But he had informed them the ſame night, when he inſtituted the ſacrament as a memorial of his death, that *the cup was the new teſtament in his blood, ſhed for many for the remiſſion of ſins.* (Matt. xxvi. 28.) This ſeems an expreſſion of the ſame meaning, and of equal force. And though it be not repeated in his conſolatory diſcourſe to his diſciples, and interceſſory prayer; yet ſufficient is ſaid to deſtroy the opinion, that repentance conſtitutes the whole of the chriſtian diſpenſation. He comforts them with the aſſurance, that his death was neceſſary for the coming of the Holy Ghoſt; that he would return in a little while to their great joy; that he went to prepare for them heavenly manſions;

manſions; and that he had gained a victory over the world, by which he would be able to defend them from oppreſſion. Before his crucifixion he did not indeed ſo fully explain the ſcheme of our redemption, as after his reſurrection. To the Jews he gave convincing proof by his miracles, that he was the Meſſiah; and prepared their minds by his parables to diſcern the nature of the kingdom of God. In like manner he qualified his apoſtles by degrees to teach others thoſe truths, which they naturally were unable to underſtand. They were filled with falſe prejudices of the nature of his office and kingdom, which he ſuffered to continue in part till after his reſurrection. *I have yet,* ſays he, *many things to ſay unto you; but ye cannot bear them now.* (Jo. xvi. 12) After his reſurrection he explained to them in the prophets all things concerning himſelf. (Lu. xxiv. 27.) And when he was aſcended into heaven, he ſent the holy Spirit to *guide them into all truth.* (Jo. xvi. 13.) As therefore it was one part of the office of the Meſſiah to be *bruiſed for our iniquities*; (Iſa. liii. 5.)

whenever our Lord aſſumes that character, he ſhould be underſtood as pointing out the end of his ſufferings. And though he ſpeaks of the death of his apoſtles as ſimilar to his own; that does not prove the former to be equally efficacious. We have ſo ſhort an account of his diſcourſes after his reſurrection, that we can conclude nothing from his ſuppoſed ſilence. What he then explained concerning the prophets, we muſt chiefly learn from the diſcourſes and writings of his apoſtles, who were commiſſioned to preach the Goſpel, and illuminated from above with all neceſſary knowledge.

The apoſtles are ſaid "to have only cal-"led upon all men every where to repent "and believe the Goſpel for the remiſſion of "their ſins;" and thence it is inferred, that "we find nothing of this doctrine of atone-"ment in the book of Acts." But it ought here to be obſerved, that when the apoſtles are admitted to have called upon men to believe the Goſpel, they muſt be ſuppoſed to mean all the doctrines, which they were commiſ-

commiſſioned to teach. If therefore this doctrine be contained in any part of their writings, it is included in this exhortation, whether it be expreſsly mentioned, or not, in their introductory diſcourſe. Whoever was called upon to embrace the Goſpel, was called upon to acknowledge Jeſus as the Meſſiah, and that neceſſarily includes every article of doing or ſuffering, which the Meſſiah was to perform. The words expiation, ſatisfaction, and atonement, may be omitted; but in every diſcourſe of the apoſtles, the doctrine is delivered, that Jeſus is the Chriſt; and from their own explanations we are authoriſed to believe, that *he died for our ſins, and was raiſed again for our juſtification.* (Ro. iv. 25.)

St. Peter is ſaid in his two firſt diſcourſes to the Jews, "to have painted in the blackeſt colours, the ſin of the Jews in crucifying our Lord, and to have exhorted them to repent, and to believe that Jeſus was the Meſſiah, for the remiſſion of their ſins; but not to have ſaid one word of ſatisfaction,

" tisfaction, expiation, or atonement, to al-
" lay any apprehenſion they might have of
" the divine juſtice." To believe that Jeſus was the Meſſiah was certainly an article diſtinct from repentance. And if it be proved from the prophets, and the writings of the apoſtles, that one part of the office of the Meſſiah was to expiate our ſins by his blood, whoever exhorted the Jews to believe in Jeſus, exhorted them to embrace our preſent faith. The great article of religion, which was neceſſary to be firſt taught, was, that Jeſus was the Meſſiah ſo long expected. But what was his office, and what the benefits of his coming, might be explained at firſt, or deferred to ſome other time, as beſt ſuited the leiſure of the apoſtles, or the circumſtances of their hearers. The Chriſtian religion is of too great extent to be fully taught in a ſingle diſcourſe. It is ſufficient therefore that the apoſtles, on any particular occaſion, mentioned expreſsly or virtually the moſt neceſſary articles to draw their hearers from their various errors, and lead them to embrace the Goſpel of Chriſt.

From

From hence we may prove, that when St. Stephen alledges to the Jews from the teſtimony of Moſes, and the evidence of his own ſight, that Jeſus was the prophet who was to come, and that he was exalted to the right hand of God, he declares him the Saviour in whom we are to truſt. "But "though he makes frequent mention of his "death," ſays this author, "he ſays not one "word of his being a propitiation for ſin." If he had ſaid ſo in expreſs words, we have no reaſon to think, that this doctrine would have been allowed upon the authority of St. Stephen by any, who reject it, when aſſerted by St. John.

Philip is alſo ſaid "to be ſilent upon this "doctrine, though he had ſo fair an oppor-"tunity of introducing it, when he was "explaining to the Eunuch the only pro-"phecy in the Old Teſtament which can be "conſtrued to repreſent it in that light; and "yet in the whole ſtory, which is not a very "conciſe one, there is no mention of this "doctrine." The whole account of Philip's

meeting with the Eunuch and his converſion is extended to fifteen verſes. But his anſwer to the queſtion, Of whom ſpeaketh the prophet this, of himſelf, or of ſome other man? is compriſed in one, and may therefore be ſaid to be very conciſe. *Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the ſame ſcripture, and preached unto him Jeſus.* (Acts viii. 35.) The paſſage in Iſaiah evidently deſcribes, under a variety of images, a juſt perſon, *who ſuffers for the iniquities of others, and by whoſe ſtripes we are healed.* (Iſa. liii. 5.) Philip declares this perſon to be Jeſus. Upon which explanation the Eunuch deſires to be baptized, and is allowed to be fit to be admitted into the church, upon profeſſing that Jeſus Chriſt is the Son of God. This proves, that Chriſt was to ſuffer by his office; and that a conviction, that Jeſus is the Meſſiah and the Son of God, may ariſe in the mind of a man deſirous of learning the truth from a right explanation of this chapter of the prophet. But we may here obſerve, that it cannot be proved from this paſſage, that Philip did not mention propitiation

tiation in the ſame words as St. John. It is conciſely ſaid, that he preached Jeſus. But we are not told, what arguments, proofs, or illuſtrations he uſed; nor how far he ſhewed the extent of the chriſtian religion. It may alſo be remarked, that the true queſtion is not, how often this doctrine is mentioned in the prophecies of the Old Teſtament; but whether our explanation of this paſſage be juſt, and confirmed by the declarations and tenor of the Goſpel.

It is aſſerted, that "St. Peter preaching to "Cornelius is ſtill ſilent about his fundamen-"tal article of the chriſtian faith." The rock upon which our Lord built his church is, that Jeſus is the Chriſt, the Son of God. This virtually contains all the peculiar doctrines of our religion. And when this was once preached and believed, it followed naturally to inſtruct the converts, what had been done for them, and what was left for themſelves to do. It is alſo aſſerted, that "what St. Peter here ſays may, without "any forced conſtruction, be turned againſt

" this favourite opinion. Of a truth I per-
" ceive that God is no reſpecter of perſons,
" *but* that, in every nation, he that feareth
" him, and worketh righteouſneſs, is ac-
" cepted of him." How this contradicts the doctrine of atonement is not explained. Probably the word *accepted* is by this author taken in ſuch a ſenſe, as to mean, that in every nation he that feareth God, and worketh righteouſneſs, is ſure of ſalvation without any mediator. But if this had been the caſe, and the Apoſtle's meaning, there would have been no occaſion for Cornelius, who was pious, devout, and charitable, *to ſend for Peter to tell him words, whereby he and all his houſe might be ſaved.* The truth is, he had made a good uſe of the means, which he had; and was therefore judged worthy of greater light. St. Peter acknowledges, that ſuch in every nation were ſo far accepted, as to be fit to be admitted into the chriſtian covenant, without being ſubject to the yoke of the law. But this proves nothing againſt an atonement. Cornelius was called upon to become a chriſtian. And the chriſtian religion

religion differs from all others, not in requiring repentance for the remiſſion of ſin, but in faith in a maſter, who died on the croſs.

St. Paul is alſo ſaid "to have treated on "many occaſions concerning the death of "Chriſt, but never with any other view, "than as an event foretold by the prophets." St. Paul undoubtedly calls in the evidence of the prophets to convince the Jews, that Jeſus was the Meſſiah, and that his death was part of the office, for which he was ſent. But it does not follow, that the prophets foretold the death of Chriſt merely to ſhew their ſkill in futurity; nor is it fact, that St. Paul draws no inference from the crucifixion to prove that he made an atonement by his blood, and that he is become our Redeemer from ſin, and a Saviour to lead us to everlaſting life. In his diſcourſe to the Jews at Antioch, he calls Jeſus *a Saviour, raiſed unto Iſrael according to God's promiſe.* He calls *the goſpel the word of ſalvation.* (Acts xiii. 23, 26.) And after mentioning

tioning the death and reſurrection of Chriſt, he tells them, that *through this man is preached unto them the forgiveneſs of ſins.* "He "ſhews the Jews," ſays this author, "the "aggravation of their ſins, and exhorts them "to repentance and to faith in Chriſt, and "nothing farther." We deſire to go no farther than faith in Chriſt, as this includes a belief of his mediation and atonement. This paſſage therefore would alone ſhew, that ſomething more than repentance is neceſſary to forgiveneſs; ſince that was taught by the law and the prophets, and a believer in Chriſt *is juſtified from all things, from which* the Jews *could not be juſtified by the law of Moſes.* (Acts xiii. 39.) The account of St. Paul's preaching to the Heathens at Lyſtra is very ſhort. He exhorts them *to turn from idolatry to the living God*; (Acts xiv. 15.) but we are not told, in what manner he opened the doctrines of the Goſpel. At Athens likewiſe he argued againſt the worſhip of falſe gods and idolatry, and exhorted to repentance from the conſideration of a future judgment, which he proves from the

the reſurrection of Chriſt. As at the mention of a reſurrection his diſcourſe was interrupted, we cannot ſay with any degree of certainty, that there would not have been "one word of what we believe to be *the true* "ſcheme of ſalvation by Jeſus Chriſt," if the apoſtle had been ſuffered to make an end. It is not then proved, that "there is nothing "in theſe diſcourſes evangelical;" nor that "all is legal and carnal;" ſince they were addreſſed to heathens, who were not ſubject to the Jewiſh law, and it was never mentioned, as having any force or obligation.

Before king Agrippa, St. Paul ſays, that *he was judged for the hope of the promiſe made of God unto their fathers.* (Acts xxvi. 6.) And when he gives an account of his faith and preaching, he appeals to Moſes and the prophets for the truth of his doctrine, that *Chriſt ſhould ſuffer and riſe again.* (Acts xxvi. 25, 26.) All this agrees perfectly with the doctrine of atonement. St. Paul does not aſſert, that repentance alone will procure the remiſſion of ſins; but joins the death and

and ſufferings of Chriſt with the light of the Goſpel, and the hopes of ſalvation.

The account of his diſcourſe at Rome is very ſhort, though he ſpake *from morning till evening*. (Acts xxviii. 23.) We cannot therefore tell, except by conjecture, in what words, or for what particular purpoſe, *he expounded and teſtified the kingdom of God, perſuading them concerning Jeſus, both out of the law of Moſes and out of the Prophets.*

All theſe paſſages to an impartial and unprejudiced perſon are very conſiſtent with the doctrine of atonement; as they preach ſalvation through Jeſus Chriſt. We cannot therefore grant, that * "the Apoſtles are abſolutely ſilent concerning this doctrine," or that "in their moſt ſerious diſcourſes "they make uſe of language that really ſets "it aſide." And if they "never once directly aſſert," in thoſe very words, "the "neceſſity of any ſatisfaction for ſin, or the "inſufficiency of our good works alone to

* Page 165, l. 1.

"entitle

" entitle us to the favour of God and future " happineſs," in the ſhort account which we have of their diſcourſes in the Acts; yet if they plainly teach this doctrine in any part of their writings, it requires our belief, as being delivered by the meſſengers of God.

But we are aſked, if we are " to build " ſo important an article of faith on mere " *hints* and *inferences* from the writings of " the Apoſtles." Hints and inferences are improperly joined together. Hints are generally ſuppoſed ſo liable to be miſtaken, that an argument drawn from them, cannot much be relied on, unleſs it be confirmed by plainer paſſages. But inferences are of greater or leſs weight according to the connection between the truths that are granted, and the concluſions which we draw. We believe this doctrine therefore not from mere hints, nor even from ſtrong inferences only; but from a variety of images illuſtrating this truth, and direct aſſertions of inſpired writers.

Having

Having aſſerted, that he has ſhewn Chriſt made no atonement, this author proceeds to point out, "from the language of the "naked facts, what the end and uſe of his "death really were, namely, to prove the "doctrine of a reſurrection to immortal life "by his own death and reſurrection." We grant, that Chriſt roſe again, and that his reſurrection was a principal part of his miniſtry; as it proved the truth of his pretenſions, and that he was not forſaken of his heavenly Father. But this neither contradicts the many texts of Scripture, which plainly expreſs or manifeſtly allude to his mediatorial office; nor does it ſhew, why he ſhould be put to a cruel and ignominious death, when he might have equally foretold and expreſſed his aſſurance of a miraculous reſurrection on the third day, if he had died the common death of all men. Neither does this explain, why Chriſt crucified was to the Jews a ſtumbling-block. If his reſurrection only is to be regarded, that would have been of the ſame nature, whatever had been his death. But it was a ſtumbling-block to their

their faith; becauſe they expected a conquering and triumphant Meſſiah, and deſpiſed a man of ſorrows and acquainted with grief. The death of Chriſt therefore, as well as his reſurrection, is one of the leading facts, which are to explain the deſign of chriſtianity; and this is to be interpreted by the declarations and doctrines of the apoſtles, and not our own unſupported imaginations.

Another manner of forming an idea of what is eſſential to chriſtianity is mentioned by this author. He ſuppoſes a number of chriſtians to be caſt upon a remote iſland, without any Bible. Theſe he obſerves "would firſt forget the apoſtolical epiſtles, "and afterwards the particular diſcourſes of "our Lord. But the laſt thing," ſays he, "they would retain would be the idea of a "man, who had the moſt extraordinary "power, ſpending his time in performing "beneficent miracles, voluntarily ſubmitting "to many inconveniences, and laſt of all to "a painful death, in a certain expectation of "being preſently raiſed to an immortal life

"and

" and to great happineſs, honour, and power,
" after death; and that theſe his expecta-
" tions were actually fulfilled. They would
" alſo remember that this perſon always
" recommended the practice of virtue." It is certain, that in ſuch a caſe, good men would remember a great part of chriſtianity; that in a few generations their knowledge would be much diminiſhed; and that the moſt abſtruſe doctrines would be the ſooneſt corrupted or forgotten. But it is not evident, that they would remember theſe particulars of our Saviour's life, and forget that he is our King and Redeemer. Beſides, the extent of our moral duty would ſoon become doubtful to chriſtians in ſuch a ſituation. And though their faith would be acceptable, if they practiſed in ſincerity according to their knowledge; yet we cannot hence determine that no articles are eſſential to our religion, the want of which might be excuſed in a ſtate of ignorance; or that chriſtians under ſuch diſadvantages ought to be repreſented, as fit to form the ſtandard of our belief.

It

It is brought as an argument againſt the doctrine of atonement, that "the true and "proper deſign of the goſpel, and conſe-"quently of the preaching and death of "Chriſt, was to aſcertain and exemplify the "great doctrines of a reſurrection and of a "future ſtate." The true and proper deſign of Chriſt's coming was undoubtedly to make us heirs of everlaſting life. This is by no means inconſiſtent with the doctrine of atonement through his blood. He ſhewed us, that notwithſtanding our ſins it was poſſible for us *not to come into condemnation, but to paſs from death unto life.* (Jo. v. 24.) But whether we are able to procure pardon, and obtain the high prize of our calling by our own efforts, or require a mediator to reconcile us to God, muſt be decided by the holy ſcriptures. The very texts, which are cited by this author, contradict the opinion, that we may rely upon our own merits alone. Two of them require faith in Chriſt; (Jo. vi. 29. xi. 25.) two others aſſert, that he brought us life, without naming the conditions; (Jo. x. 10. 2 Tim. i. 10.) and the fifth

declares, that the keys of death and the grave are in his power. (Rev. i. 8.) As one condition of our future ſalvation is holineſs of life, it is no wonder, that it is frequently mentioned with the death of Chriſt. And as he was an example of obedience to the will of God, his death was the greateſt proof of his reſignation. He likewiſe fulfilled the law and the prophets, by carrying morality to the greateſt extent, and both doing and ſuffering all that had been foretold concerning the Meſſiah. But all this implies no contradiction, why he might not at the ſame time ſatisfy the divine juſtice by his death. And if the latter is aſſerted in the holy ſcriptures, either expreſsly or by direct conſequence, ſuch reaſoning is only an attempt to ſet at variance conſiſtent truths, and to hide from our eyes, that Chriſt was the Son of God, and Redeemer of the world; becauſe we acknowledge him the ſon of man, the greateſt of prophets, and a teacher of righteouſneſs. The whole of his character illuſtrates each part; and whatever is plainly taught in the ſcripture

we

ve are bound to believe, though it may con-radict our prejudices, conjectures, and opi-ıions.

The belief of our church is, that ſacri-ice under the Moſaic law was appointed to tone for ſin, and that this had reference to he only true ſacrifice, the Lamb of God; s the ceremonies of the law were *a ſhadow f things to come, but the body is of Chriſt.* Col. ii. 17.) This idea is combated by a ariety of arguments, in which a figurative xpreſſion ſeems frequently left unexplained, r diſmiſſed as uſeleſs, and without any de-ɛrminate meaning. Chriſt is acknowledged y this writer to be often called a ſacrifice ı the Epiſtle to the Hebrews, and five times ı other paſſages of the New Teſtament. ɔut the force of theſe texts, to prove the tonement, is attempted to be evaded by the ɔllowing methods.

It is objected to the texts from the Epiſtle o the Hebrews, that it is the epiſtle of an ınknown writer, for "it is not certain, at

" leaſt, that it was written by Paul." It is delivered down to us by the primitive church, as the epiſtle of one of the apoſtles, probably of St. Paul; and before its authority is ſlighted, it ſhould be proved, that we have not ſufficient reaſon to attribute it to ſome inſpired writer. The doctrines contained in it are confirmed by St. Paul, who expreſsly aſſerts, that *the law was our ſchoolmaſter to bring us unto Chriſt.* (Gal. iii. 24.) It is ſaid " to abound with the ſtrongeſt " figures, metaphors, and allegories." But figures, metaphors, and allegories, are not without meaning. And when that meaning is underſtood, they equally require our belief, as the plaineſt paſſages of ſcripture. It is alſo ſaid, that " the reſt of the paſſages " are too few to bear the very great ſtreſs that " is laid upon them; and that this idea is " only introduced indirectly into theſe texts." But it is our duty to endeavour to underſtand the real meaning of the ſcriptures; and not to expect, that every idea ſhould be conveyed in ſuch a manner, as a prejudiced perſon will allow to be direct, or that a truth ſhould

ſhould be as often repeated, as may ſeem needful to our weak apprehenſions. If Chriſt were only once ſtyled a ſacrifice, it ought to be explained, how he could be a ſacrifice without anſwering the chief end of ſuch an inſtitution; or we ſhould be led to believe, that our ſins were forgiven for the ſake of his death, and that we were to be ſaved *through faith in his blood.* (Ro. iii. 25.)

In contradiction to our tranſlation of Iſaiah, *when thou ſhalt make his ſoul an offering for ſin,* (If. liii. 10.) it is aſſerted*, that "the death of Chriſt, though frequently "mentioned, or alluded to, by the ancient "prophets, is never ſpoken of as a ſin offering. "The propriety of our tranſlation," it is ſaid, "may be doubted, or, if it be retained, can-"not be proved to exhibit any thing more "than a figurative alluſion." If our tranſlation of this paſſage be faulty, the error ought to be pointed out, and the true meaning reſtored. For if the vulgar be taught to ſet

* Page 184, l. 17.

aſide the authority of particular texts, merely becauſe the ſenſe is ſaid to be doubtful, the ſcripture will ceaſe to be their guide in religion, and they will be carried away by every wind of doctrine, by the deceitful craft of thoſe men, who can moſt eaſily impoſe upon their prejudices and paſſions. And if it be rightly tranſlated, it is not a bare figurative alluſion to the Jewiſh ſacrifices, but a direct aſſertion, that the death of our Saviour anſwered the ſame end, for which they were appointed that were offered to expiate the ſins of the Iſraelites. And conſequently, as the blood of bulls and of goats cannot waſh away ſin, that it did in reality, what they repreſented in a figure, and that it was the ſubſtance, and they the ſhadow.

It is aſſerted*, that "the Jewiſh ſacrifices "are no where ſaid, in the Old Teſtament, "to have any reference to another more per-"fect ſacrifice, as might have been expected "if they really had any ſuch reference." To this it may be anſwered, that the ſcheme

* Page 185, l. 4.

of

of God's providence and of our redemption was not fully revealed under the law. The whole world was informed in the perſon of Adam, that *the ſeed of the woman ſhould bruiſe the ſerpent's head*; (Gen. iii. 15.) and from the time of Abraham, in conſequence of God's covenant, his deſcendants had reaſon to expect, that *in his ſeed ſhould all the nations of the earth be bleſſed.* (Gen. xxii. 18.) But the manner of this tranſaction was not completely unveiled, till Chriſt himſelf brought life and immortality to light. We ſhould therefore ſearch impartially, whether this doctrine be taught in the goſpel, and not decide, that it has no foundation, becauſe it is not declared in a particular manner in the law and the prophets.

But it is objected*, that "ſacrifice is only "oppoſed to good works or moral virtue, "whenever it is declared inſufficient to pro-"cure the favour of God." When ſacrifice is declared in the ſcriptures to be of no value, it is on account of want of ſincerity. Sa-

* P. 185, l. 4.

crifice was intended to ſhew the malignity and deformity of ſin, and thence induce men to repentance and amendment. If therefore it is found alone, it is pronounced uſeleſs, and even abominable, as leading men to rely upon outward works, without inward purity. It could not in this ſenſe be oppoſed to the death of Chriſt; becauſe that is inſufficient without the ſame conditions. Chriſt came not into the world to excuſe the neglect, but to enforce the neceſſity of virtue. The general ſtrain therefore of the paſſages quoted above does not appear extraordinary upon the ſuppoſition, that the Jewiſh ſacrifices prefigured the death of Chriſt. And if they did not, this author ſhould declare, what end they were deſigned to anſwer; or whether he thinks them uſeleſs, though they were appointed by God to expiate ſin, as well as to expreſs homage and adoration.

"Many other things," he adds*, "beſides "the death of Chriſt, are expreſsly called "ſacrifices by the ſacred writers; and chriſ-

* Page 186, l. 13.

"tians

" tians in general are called prieſts, as well " as Chriſt himſelf. Why then," it is aſked, " may not the death of Chriſt be called " a ſacrifice only in a figurative ſenſe?" The former are evidently figures; but the ſame cannot be ſaid of the latter. The queſtion muſt therefore be determined by the general tenor of ſcripture, and the uſe of the Jewiſh ſacrifices upon each ſuppoſition.

Many figures are undoubtedly uſed in the writings of the Apoſtles. But whether Chriſt, who promoted the reformation of the world by his doctrines, ſhould only figuratively be called a ſacrifice for the ſins of men by a real death; or whether the word is to be taken in a literal ſenſe, muſt depend upon the nature and circumſtances of our Saviour's death, compared with the doctrines of ſcripture. When the literal acceptation is ſupported by the ſame idea being repreſented under various images of deliverance from ſlavery, and reſtoration to life, by the means of Chriſt, and he is expreſsly called the

the propitiation for our ſins, it ſeems preferable to any other interpretation, which would imply, that the Apoſtles by their expreſſions led us into falſe opinions, and that they obſcurely delivered the principal part of their meſſage. For their frequent reference to the Jewiſh rites is much better accounted for by admitting a real connection between the ceremonies of the law and the chriſtian doctrines, than by ſuppoſing that the Apoſtles remained under the prejudices of education, after they were enlightened by the gifts of the Holy Ghoſt; ſince by theſe gifts they became *ſcribes inſtructed unto the kingdom of heaven,* (Mat. xiii. 52.) who could *bring out of their treaſure things new and old.*

The death of Chriſt is ſaid "to want many "things eſſential to a proper ſacrifice for "ſin." One only is named, that "it was "not provided and preſented by the ſin-"ner." But this circumſtance can neither be proved eſſential by reaſon, nor is it ſo declared by revelation.

Sacrifices

Sacrifices under the law are ſuppoſed by us to prefigure the death of Chriſt. This idea is combated by aſſerting, that they are only "gifts or entertainments." But as it is allowed, that they might be uſed to deprecate the anger of God, or man, they muſt perform this ſervice, either by their own value as a gift, by expreſſing our inward diſpoſition, or by reference to ſome other object. That they were not regarded on their own account, as a gift, is plain from the book of Pſalms, where God ſays, *all the beaſts of the foreſt are mine: and ſo are the cattle upon a thouſand hills.* (Pſ. l. 10.) And though repentance was ſo neceſſary to accompany ſacrifice, that without ſorrow for ſin the outward act was of no value; yet there is nothing peculiar in this rite to lead us to ſuppoſe, that it was appointed as an emblem, means, or pledge of this diſpoſition. It is moſt natural therefore to conclude with the author of the Epiſtle to the Hebrews, that it was a type of the true *Lamb of God, which taketh away the ſin of the world.* (Heb. ix. 13, 14. Jo. i. 29.) Whether ſacrifices were firſt commanded by God,

God, or invented by man to expreſs his gratitude and homage, is a queſtion of little importance; ſince ſacrifices for ſin were commanded by the law of Moſes, and forgiveneſs promiſed upon the right performance. And though every ſuch ſacrifice was an offering or gift, as well as the vows or free-will offerings; yet it differed from them in this, that it had reference to ſin, and was followed by expiation, and therefore became a juſt type of the death of Chriſt. The practice of the Philiſtines and other heathen nations of making atonement by offerings of gold, being not commanded by God, is of no weight to determine the preſent queſtion. And the ceremonies, which were uſed in this and other ſacrifices, are not of much importance; ſince it is evident, from the very uſe of language, that a ſacrifice for ſin, however it might agree in ſome points with others, muſt have reference to tranſgreſſion and forgiveneſs.

But it is ſaid, that atonement was made by other methods. Phineas made atonement

ment by ſlaying the tranſgreſſors, Moſes by prayer, and Aaron by incenſe. But this is by no means inconſiſtent with the notion, that the death of Chriſt is the only true and proper ſacrifice, and that the legal ſacrifices, and all other religious rites, owe their efficacy to their reference to Chriſt's blood, which waſhes away our guilt, and makes us capable of addreſſing our heavenly Father.

The reſurrection of Chriſt is mentioned as having the ſame uſe with his death. It is therefore concluded, that "the death of "Chriſt is not a proper ſacrifice, and that "the forgiveneſs of ſins does not depend on "it only. *He was raiſed again for our juſti-"fication.*" (Ro. iv. 25.) The whole paſſage is very plain, and confirms the doctrine, which it is brought to confute. *Who was delivered for our offences, and was raiſed again for our juſtification.* The death and reſurrection of Chriſt are mentioned as two acts, the one of which was the conſequence of the other. The death of Chriſt was cauſed by our ſins. By his reſurrection God declared his

his acceptance of his death, and that the faithful were henceforth juſtified in his ſight.

"The death of Chriſt is ſaid to be often "denominated in ſcripture in a manner in- "conſiſtent with the notion of a proper ſa- "crifice." As no inſtance is given, it can here only be obſerved, that the idea of a ſacrifice is not inconſiſtent with a ranſom, deliverance by victory, mediation, or interceſſion; and that it perfectly coincides with the notion of atonement and propitiation, which we conceive to belong to the office of our Saviour. Our Lord is often ſpoken of in plain language, and often in that which is figurative. And though it is aſked*, "if "one of the repreſentations be real and the "reſt figurative, how we are to diſtinguiſh "among them, when the writers themſelves "give no intimation of any ſuch difference;" it does not follow, as is here aſſerted, that "this circumſtance alone ſeems to prove that "they made uſe of all theſe repreſentations "in the ſame view, which, therefore, could

* Page 192, l. 15.

"be

" be no other than as compariſons in certain " reſpects." It is not difficult for common ſenſe and reaſon to diſtinguiſh from the ſubject of the diſcourſe and the context, whether a word is uſed in a literal or metaphorical ſenſe. We are not therefore reduced to any neceſſity of underſtanding every thing literally concerning our Lord, and thus giving way to the doctrine of tranſubſtantiation; or reſolving the cleareſt expreſſions into obſcure figures, and repreſenting the peculiar doctrines of chriſtianity as vague and uncertain. It is very unuſual in any author to declare, which words are to be taken in a figurative ſenſe; and yet no one complains of obſcurity, where metaphors are uſed with moderation, or deſpairs on this account of being able to underſtand his real meaning. Chriſt is often called a ſacrifice in the New Teſtament. If he did not really ſuffer for the ſins of men, it ſhould be ſatisfactorily ſhewn, in what reſpects the compariſon holds. And if ſin offerings under the law had no other reference to forgiveneſs and tranſgreſſion than to expreſs that homage and gratitude,

gratitude, which was ſignified by every other offering that bore a different name, we want a reaſon, why God appointed a bloody ſacrifice, for the reconciliation of ſinners. I ſhall therefore conclude this head and my preſent diſcourſe with obſerving, that the ſcriptures are not ſilent concerning the atonement of our Saviour; ſince it was ſhadowed out by the ſacrifices of the law, and the Apoſtles in all their diſcourſes proclaimed him the Meſſiah, of whom Iſaiah propheſied, that by his ſtripes we are healed.

THE PROOFS AND USES OF CHRIST'S ATONEMENT.

1 JOHN ii. 1, 2.

If any man ſin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jeſus Chriſt the righteous: and he is the propitiation for our ſins: and not for our ſins only, but alſo for the ſins of the whole world.

HAVING examined, in a former diſcourſe upon theſe words, the objections, which have been made to the eſtabliſhed belief, that the death of Chriſt was a proper ſacrifice for the ſins of mankind, I proceed,

Secondly, to ſhew, how ſtrongly this doctrine is taught in the holy ſcriptures.

The belief of our church is, that Jeſus Chriſt, the only begotten Son of God, deſcended from heaven, and was incarnate of the Virgin Mary; that the end of his coming was to appeaſe the wrath of God by his ſufferings, to inſtruct us perfectly in our duty, to procure us grace to walk in the right path, if we be not wanting to ourſelves, and to ſet us an example of patience, humility, benevolence, and all other virtues. Our adverſaries grant him to be a true prophet and righteous man; they do not deny the excellence of his precepts, and ſeem willing to allow him ſome authority as a lawgiver. But whilſt they do not define the extent of his power, nor admit that his commiſſion was to ratify a new covenant, they weaken the ſtrict obligation of his commands, and render his doctrines liable to be ſlighted. But the denial of his atonement ſtrikes at the very foundation of Chriſtianity, as believed and profeſſed by all other parties. Let us therefore impartially examine, whether the ſcriptures give us reaſon to regard Jeſus as the Saviour and Redeemer of mankind by the

the offering of his blood, and the ſacrifice of himſelf; or whether he was only a prophet of great power and dignity, and the notion of his atonement introduced into the church after the death of the apoſtles.

When the angel informed Joſeph of the purity of the Virgin Mary, and of her divine conception, he ordered him to call the child that ſhould be born of her by the name of Jeſus, becauſe he ſhould ſave his people from their ſins. In like manner St. John ſaluted him as the Meſſiah: *Behold the Lamb of God, that taketh away the ſin of the world.* (Jo. i. 29.) Iſaiah alſo propheſied, that he ſhould *be wounded for our tranſgreſſions, and bruiſed for our iniquities, that the chaſtiſement of our peace ſhould be upon him, and with his ſtripes we ſhould be healed.* (Iſ. liii. 5.) Chriſt himſelf declares, that *he would give his fleſh for the life of the world.* (Jo. vi. 51.) The author of the Epiſtle to the Hebrews aſſerts the neceſſity of a ſacrifice for the pardon of ſinners, or that *without ſhedding of blood there is no remiſſion.* (Heb. ix. 22.)

The ſacrifices of the law, which were offered as expiations, prove the efficacy of our Saviour's atonement. They were appointed by God himſelf. In their own nature they were utterly incapable of taking away ſin. (Heb. x. 4.) They muſt therefore bear a relation to ſome other ſacrifice. And they cannot be types of any other thing, than the death of Chriſt. In this view the burthenſome ceremonies of the law were very uſeful, when they kept in memory the promiſes of a better covenant. But in any other light we cannot ſee or learn, why God ſhould appoint ſuch a number of rites, which had neither power to promote morality, expiate offences, nor procure his favour, unleſs they had reference to ſome other more perfect and ſpiritual inſtitution.

Chriſt is acknowledged to be frequently mentioned, as having *died for us*. This is interpreted of his dying on our account, or for our benefit. For our greateſt benefit it undoubtedly was; and we may well take it for what it is plainly deſcribed in ſcripture,

ture, the forgiveneſs of our ſins, and reconciliation with God, upon faith and repentance.

But it is farther ſaid*, that "if theſe "words be rigorouſly interpreted, they will "only mean, that Chriſt died for us conſe-"quentially, and by no means properly and "directly as a ſubſtitute. For if, in conſe-"quence of Chriſt not having been ſent to "inſtruct and reform the world, mankind "had continued unreformed, and the neceſ-"ſary conſequence of Chriſt's coming was "his death, by whatever means, and in "whatever manner it was brought about, it "is plain that there was, in fact, no other "alternative, but his death, or ours." We grant that Chriſt came to inſtruct and reform the world, and to perfect the great diſpenſation of God. We grant likewiſe, that the neceſſary conſequence of Chriſt's coming was his death. But this was not the neceſſary conſequence of his coming to inſtruct, but to redeem mankind. Let this author there-

* Page 199.

fore ſhew, why the death of our Saviour was more neceſſary upon his ſuppoſition, than that of any other prophet; or confeſs, that the intention of our Lord's coming was ſomething more than inſtruction or reformation. "Nothing," ſays he, "but declara-"tions more definite and expreſs, contained "at leaſt in ſome parts of ſcripture, could "authoriſe us to interpret in this manner "ſuch general expreſſions as the following." This obſervation ſeems evidently deſigned to perſuade the ignorant, that our Saviour is no where repreſented in plain texts to have made ſatisfaction or atonement for the guilt of man. But that Chriſt is the propitiation for our ſins is an expreſs declaration to this purpoſe by St. John. And the ſame doctrine is taught by a variety of eaſy figures in many other places of ſcripture. We are therefore authoriſed to interpret general expreſſions alluding to this ſubject in a ſimilar ſenſe. Four texts are here quoted as inſufficient of themſelves to prove this doctrine. *I am the good ſhepherd: the good ſhepherd giveth his life for the ſheep.* (Jo. x. 11.) Upon this it is obſerved,

obſerved, that "the ſhepherd does not die "for the ſheep, in conſequence of a com-"pact," and that "it is no proper parallel "to the death of Chriſt on the principle of "the doctrine of atonement." No one, I believe, ever ſaid that it was; or underſtood it as any more than a compariſon expreſſive of our Saviour's zeal and affection for his flock. This is attempted to be explained as contradictory to our notion of atonement. But the other three are left without the leaſt comment; though of a different nature, being plain aſſertions. *Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friend.* (Jo. xv. 13.) *Chriſt hath once ſuffered for ſins, the juſt for the unjuſt, that he might bring us to God.* (1 Pet. iii. 18.) This text ſurely conveys the idea of a pure and perfect Mediator; though it leaves unexplained the terms of the covenant. *It is expedient for us, that one man ſhould die for the people, and that the whole nation periſh not.* (Jo. xi. 50.) The high prieſt himſelf only meant by theſe words to adviſe the death of Chriſt, as an expedient to preſerve the temporal

death of Chriſt was directly the means of our deliverance from the ſlavery of ſin.

Chriſt is ſaid *to bear the ſins of men.* (Iſ. liii. 11, 12. 1 Pet. ii. 24. Heb. ix. 28.) This is explained by "taking them away." The word will undoubtedly bear that ſenſe, and in ſome of the paſſages that alone. But if we enquire by what means he took away our ſins, we ſhall find it aſcribed to his crucifixion. And if we grant, that our ſins are taken away, becauſe he died upon the croſs; there ſeems no reaſon, why we ſhould not acknowledge him as our Redeemer, in the common ſenſe of the word; unleſs ſome clear and expreſs declaration could be brought to prove his death neceſſary upon any other ſuppoſition.

We believe Chriſt to be our Saviour, becauſe we are required to aſk in his name. To this it is objected, that "if *all ſin* be "forgiven for the ſake of Chriſt only, we "ought at leaſt to have been expreſsly told "ſo." And we are expreſsly told ſo by St. John

John in the very next verſe to that, which is quoted in the page preceding. *If any man ſin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jeſus Chriſt the righteous: and he is the propitiation for our ſins; and not for our ſins only, but alſo for the whole world.* (1 Jo. ii. 1, 2.) In oppoſition to the doctrine of the interceſſion of Chriſt, it is ſaid, that "the holy Spirit is much more frequently "and properly called our advocate." That both are properly called our advocates we readily believe. But if Chriſt be not properly our advocate to gain his faithful followers acceptance, it ſhould be ſhewn, what theſe texts mean, which certainly aſcribe to him ſome interceſſion by giving him this title. He confirms and explains this notion, when he aſſures his diſciples, that *whatſoever they ſhould aſk in his name,* (Jo. xvi. 23.) they ſhould obtain.

It is obſerved*, that "our Saviour never "ſays that forgiveneſs of ſin was procured "by him, but he always ſpeaks of the free "mercy of God in the ſame manner as the

* Page 205, l. 9.

"prophets,

" prophets, who preceded him; and it is " particularly remarkable, that in his laſt " prayer, which is properly interceſſory, we " find nothing on the ſubject." Our Saviour always repreſents himſelf as the Meſſiah; he proves to the Jews that he had power on earth to forgive ſins, and declares in this very prayer, *this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jeſus Chriſt whom thou haſt ſent.* (Jo. xvii. 3.) Though he may not therefore ſet forth this doctrine in every place in a particular form, it ought not to be denied, if it be taught in any words by him or his apoſtles. The chief end of this prayer is to beg proſperity and protection for his church, whilſt on earth. Chriſt indeed taught repentance and morality, as preceding prophets had done, though with more perfection. But he aſſumed at the ſame time much greater dignity; as none of them called himſelf the only ſon of God, the king of the Jews, or the giver of life eternal. (Jo. xvii. 2.)

Repentance and remiſſion of ſin are ſaid

to

to be preached *in the name of Chriſt*, and *through Chriſt*. From this we may well infer, that he is our Saviour in ſome peculiar and exalted ſenſe. But this is ſaid to be "eaſily explained on the idea, that the "preaching of the goſpel reforms the world, "and that the remiſſion of ſin is conſequent "on reformation." All this is poſitively aſſerted. But the manner of ſpeaking evidently implies, that remiſſion of ſin is owing to Chriſt in ſome ſenſe, in which it was never aſcribed to any other prophet; ſince it is preached in his name alone, though they all contributed by their doctrine to reform the world. But it is farther objected, that "had "ſin been forgiven in a proper and ſtrict "ſenſe, for the ſake of Chriſt," the word *freely* would hardly have been uſed. Romans iii. 24. *Being juſtified freely by his grace.* But the word *freely* means in oppoſition to our works; and in this very text the redemption of Chriſt is expreſsly mentioned as a cauſe of forgiveneſs; *through the redemption that is in Chriſt Jeſus.*

Becauſe

Becauſe "the pardon of ſin is repreſent-
"ed" in different places, "as diſpenſed in
"conſideration of the ſufferings, merit, life,
"or obedience of Chriſt, they are concluded
"to be partial repreſentations, which at pro-
"per diſtances are allowed to be inconſiſt-
"ent without any charge of impropriety*."
This, though darkly expreſſed, ſeems deſign-
ed to take away all meaning from thoſe texts,
which aſcribe our forgiveneſs in any reſpect
to Chriſt. But as the ſufferings, merit, re-
ſurrection, life, and obedience of our Saviour,
all belonged to the ſame perſon, and are con-
nected together, we cannot grant any incon-
ſiſtency in aſcribing forgiveneſs ſeparately to
each, as the reſt are not thereby meant to be
excluded. Chriſt came down from heaven
to ſave mankind; he preached repentance and
obedience, as neceſſary conditions on our
part; and therefore his precepts and exam-
ple, as well as his death and reſurrection, con-
tributed to the reformation and ſalvation of
the world. But it is not "the plain general
"tenor of ſcripture," as this author aſſerts

* Page 207.

it

it to be, "that the pardon of ſin is in reality "always diſpenſed by the free mercy of God, "on account of men's perſonal virtue, a pe- "nitent upright heart, and a reformed ex- "emplary life, without regard to the ſuffer- "ings or merit of any being whatever*." It is true, that pardon of ſin is always aſcribed in ſcripture to the free mercy of God; becauſe we can do nothing of ourſelves to deſerve it. Our perſonal virtue, though neceſſary, is no where repreſented as properly meritorious. We are exhorted to repentance and reformation; and, if we obey, and come to God through Chriſt, are ſure to be accepted. But that God pays no regard to the ſufferings or merit of his Son, is a mere aſſertion. At his transfiguration the diſciples were commanded to *hear him*, becauſe *he was the beloved Son* of God. (Mat. xvii. 5.) And Chriſt himſelf ſays, *therefore doth my Father love me, becauſe I lay down my life, that I might take it again.* (Jo. x. 17.) The dignity therefore and death of our Saviour are repreſented in ſcripture as eſſential part of

* Page 207, l. 12.

his miſſion. Theſe doctrines are indeed frequently delivered in figurative expreſſions. But the figurative language of ſcripture as certainly has a meaning as the plaineſt paſſages. And till ſome other meaning be pointed out more conſiſtent, not with men's natural notions of God, which may be defective or erroneous, but with the general tenor of the goſpel, we ſhall believe, that we are *waſhed from our ſins by the blood of Chriſt*, (Rev. i. 5.) and made joint heirs with him in conſideration of his death.

And unleſs the atonement be the chief article of the chriſtian religion, it does not appear, why St. Paul ſhould *glory in the croſs of Chriſt*. (Gal. vi. 14.) In all things indifferent he made it a rule to comply with the infirmities of men. But though he knew, that this doctrine was *to the Jews a ſtumbling-block, and to the Greeks fooliſhneſs*; (1 Co. i. 23, 24.) yet he eſteemed it *the power of God, and the wiſdom of God*; and preferred the ſcheme of God's providence, though ſlighted by the world, to the boaſted wiſdom of man's natural abilities. In ſhort, the ſcripture

ure has a conſtant eye to this doctrine, and epreſents the redemption of mankind as the hief end of Chriſt's ſufferings. *Ye were not edeemed with corruptible things, as ſilver and old; but with the precious blood of Chriſt, as of a lamb without blemiſh and without ſpot.* (1 Pet. i. 18, 19.) If therefore we diſclaim this article, we make a great part of the ſcriptures unintelligible, and render the reaſoning of St. Paul really inconcluſive. And if we could perſuade the modern infidels to accept ſuch a religion, we ſhould only make them converts to a ſyſtem of morality, where they would give no credit to its ſanctions beyond the dictates of their own reaſon, prejudices, and paſſions; and would conſequently be involved in all the doubts and uncertainties of the ancient philoſophers. Whereas the ſcriptures were intended to bring life and immorality to light. They ſhew us a conſiſtent ſcheme of faith and practice. Their doctrines are capable of being apprehended as to the fact; though the manner of ſome myſteries may exceed the comprehenſion of our preſent faculties. Let us not then prefer darkneſs to

light. But let us rather chuſe to be guided by the words of inſpired writers, than the moſt confident aſſertions of fallible men; and ſubmit our reaſon to the wiſdom of God, rejecting the deceitful ſyſtems of human imaginations. I proceed,

Thirdly, to point out, what uſe we may make of the knowledge of this truth to confirm our faith, and improve our practice.

The attributes of God, as revealed in the ſcriptures, do not barely increaſe our knowledge of the nature of the Deity; but rectify and improve thoſe diſpoſitions, which have the greateſt influence upon the practice of our duty. Thus the majeſty, wiſdom, purity, juſtice and goodneſs of God, naturally call for our reverence, reſignation, virtue, obedience, and gratitude. In the great work of our redemption, what belonged to God alone remains in a great meaſure a myſtery, concerning which *we now ſee through a glaſs darkly*; (1 Co. xiii. 12.) and *which things* even *the angels deſire to look into* more perfectly.

ectly. (1 Pet. i. 12.) But what was done upon earth had not only reference to God, as it appeaſed his wrath, and procured our pardon; but was deſigned to make us more averſe from thoſe ſins, which cauſe our ruin, and to excite us to thoſe virtues, which are neceſſary to the character of our Lord's diſciples.

The crucifixion then of our Saviour proves in the ſtrongeſt manner the great guilt and danger of ſin. The crime indeed of diſobeying and offending the infinite majeſty of God may be ſatisfactorily proved by reaſon alone. And every one is bound to liſten to the dictates of his conſcience, which, when unbiaſſed, declares the law of God to be holy, juſt, and good, and condemns all ungodlineſs and worldly luſts. But the deductions of reaſon are ſometimes obſcure to the ignorant; and often diſregarded or forgotten by the negligent, and evaded by the profane. The fact therefore of the atonement, which is recorded in the ſcripture, ſets full before the eyes of the weakeſt and

moſt thoughtleſs the greatneſs of the debt in the value of the ranſom; and the ruin, to which we muſt have been expoſed without remedy, if we had not been redeemed by the Son of God. Accordingly St. Paul in his Epiſtle to the Romans joins thoſe truths together as cloſely connected. *O wretched man that I am! who ſhall deliver me from the body of this death? I thank God through Jeſus Chriſt our Lord.* (Ro. vii. 24, 25.)

The crucifixion of Chriſt, conſidered as an atonement, proves alſo the certainty of our pardon. If indeed God had promiſed by any prophet ſufficiently authorized, that he would forgive our offences upon repentance and amendment, we might, without knowing the method of our redemption, have taken it for granted, that he had adopted ſome means of ſatisfying his own juſtice. But though a revelation, accompanied with far leſs ſtrength and variety of evidence than the goſpel, would have demanded our aſſent; yet, whilſt we are in the fleſh, it is a gracious condeſcenſion in God, that he adapts the

the doctrines of religion to our nature, and not only gives us outward ſigns of inward grace, but connects the great truths of chriſtianity with hiſtorical events, and thus does not confine the knowledge of divine truths to the wiſe and learned, but makes them plain to the capacity of the weak and ignorant. Thus the crucifixion ſhews, under a variety of ſcriptural figures, that our debt is diſcharged, our ranſom paid, and our chains looſed; and the reſurrection affords an equal argument, that God has accepted this ſacrifice, and enabled the captain of our ſalvation to triumph over all our ſpiritual enemies.

The death of Chriſt, as the cauſe of our redemption, binds us to the ſervice of our Saviour. *Ye are bought*, ſays St. Paul, *with a price*; and *being made free from ſin, and become ſervants to God, ye have your fruit unto holineſs, and the end everlaſting life.* (1 Co. vii. 23.) We ſhould therefore be deſirous of learning his will, and obeying his commands, as his ſervice is not only reaſonable in itſelf,

but will be attended with the moſt valuable reward. *For the wages of ſin is death: but the gift of God is eternal life through Jeſus Chriſt our Lord.* (Ro. vi. 23.)

Laſtly, our Lord's atonement ſhould ſtir up our gratitude, both to God, who planned and accepted this ranſom for our ſouls, and to our Saviour, who voluntarily for our ſakes drank of this bitter cup. The wiſdom of the ſcheme may ſurpaſs our comprehenſion, and the condeſcenſion of God and Chriſt in vouchſafing to invite the greateſt ſinners to repent and be ſaved, and to pay the ranſom for his murderers and blaſphemers, may appear moſt wonderful, as it is without example. But this is no ground of diſbelief; ſince *God's thoughts are not our thoughts, neither are our ways his ways.* (Iſ. lv. 8.) We ſhould therefore examine the ſcriptures, and readily believe all the doctrines therein contained. And as this is declared and alluded to, through the whole of God's diſpenſations, we ſhould be hence excited to ſhew our gratitude to our Saviour by entertaining a due

a due ſenſe of his dignity and glory, acknowledging his goodneſs, and copying his perfect example in ſuch diſpoſitions, as are calculated to bring forth virtuous actions. And if at any time we are called upon to undergo any hardſhip, or bear any diſappointment, for the ſake of our duty, let us remember, that he endured the ſevereſt afflictions and moſt painful ſufferings for our good, and that we by perſeverance are ſure to make every temporal evil *work for us* hereafter *a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.* (2 Co. iv. 17.)

THE NATURE OF FAITH.

HEBREWS xi. 6.

Without faith it is impoſſible to pleaſe him: for he that cometh to God, muſt believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently ſeek him.

WHEN we view our own nature, we find ourſelves capable of happineſs in a greater degree than we ever experience in this vale of ſin and miſery. Accordingly the ſcripture informs us, that happineſs was the end of our creation, that it was forfeited by man's own fault, and that we are again reſtored through Chriſt to a capacity of obtaining the divine favour. But though in the

the great work of our redemption our Saviour has performed what was not in our power; yet he has not opened to us the proſpect of everlaſting life without our concurrence. He has ſhewn us the road to ſalvation, and promiſed us ſufficient aſſiſtance *to run the race that is ſet before us.* But we muſt add our own endeavours by the exerciſe of our reaſon to diſcern the truth; and conform our wills to the precepts of our heavenly Father. Full credit ſhould therefore be given to the words of the God of truth, and an entire confidence be placed in his gracious promiſes. As then faith and obedience are both neceſſary to form the ſincere chriſtian, I ſhall make them the ſubject of two ſeparate diſcourſes, and, confining myſelf at preſent to the former,

Firſt, enquire what particulars conſtitute the faith of a chriſtian. And,

Secondly, compare the principal doctrines of the church of England with the tenets of

of our adverſaries, to determine which are moſt agreeable to the holy ſcriptures.

Firſt, I am to enquire what particulars conſtitute the faith of a chriſtian.

The faith of a chriſtian firſt leads him to acknowledge the truth and authority of the Old and New Teſtament.

We are not only ſenſible, that reaſon alone, beſides its weakneſs, is liable to be miſled by our paſſions and prejudices; but we have poſitive evidence of various kinds, that God has actually revealed to us his will in the holy ſcriptures. Whether the whole of the ſcriptures be the word of an infallible God, and given as a neceſſary rule in religion to direct our thoughts, words, and actions, or the invention of prudent, though fallible men, is a queſtion of the utmoſt importance to be rightly decided. If we err by diſbelief, we run the riſk of diſobedience to the will of God. And if we attribute too much authority to the dictates of man,

we

we ſhall be liable to adopt implicitly his miſtakes and impoſitions. The ſcriptures are indeed delivered to us by the intervention of men, who were naturally as weak and of like paſſions with ourſelves. But as they certainly received ſome power from on high, we may reaſonably believe, independent of their own teſtimony, that they were ſo far ſtrengthened by divine aſſiſtance, as to be clear and infallible guides in all things conducive to eternal ſalvation. For it would be abſurd to imagine, that God ſhould in any caſe propoſe an end, and leave his inſtruments unable to produce it. When therefore we find the whole ſcripture collected by the authority of the Jewiſh and chriſtian churches, when we find the different parts of the law and the goſpel moſt intimately mixed, and when we find the former as well as the latter confirmed by the authority of our Saviour and his apoſtles, we muſt conclude not only that thoſe parts are owing to immediate inſpiration, which are expreſsly declared to be ſuch; but that the general declarations of the divine authority of the ſcriptures are to be extended

tended to all other paſſages that regard religion; and conſequently that the moſt poſitive or ſpecious aſſertions of human wiſdom and learning muſt be brought to this teſt, and ſtand or fall, as they are agreeable or contradictory to the doctrines of revelation.

A firm reliance upon the promiſes of God, as delivered in the ſcriptures, is likewiſe included in the faith of a chriſtian. *He that cometh to God muſt believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently ſeek him.* (Heb. xi. 6.) But as we are all ſinners, we muſt liſten to the promiſes of pardon, before we entertain hopes of a reward. *Not by works of righteouſneſs, which we have done, but according to his mercy he ſaved us.* (Tit. iii. 5.) This pardon is aſſured to us in Chriſt Jeſus, and we have the farther promiſe of heavenly aſſiſtance to enlighten our minds, overcome our bad diſpoſitions, reſiſt the wiles of our ſpiritual enemy, and enable us both to will and to do of God's good pleaſure. And if we perſevere unto the end in a virtuous courſe, we are certain of being rewarded

warded for ever with glory and happiness far above our present conceptions. *Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him.* (1 Cor. ii. 9.) But when we profess to believe the promises of God, we must believe them in the very sense, in which they are delivered, which is, that we are bound to perform our part by a sincere obedience. We can safely take our notions of the attributes of God only from the scriptures; since if we follow our own imaginations in extending the bounds of his mercy, we may by our ignorance contradict his office. But if we presume to further than we are warranted by his own word, we may rely upon his truth and goodness, and our faith will be, in the present life, the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.

The last object of our faith is the character of our Lord Jesus Christ, through the various offices, which he sustained upon earth, and the transcendent dignity, to which even his human nature is exalted in heaven. He was

a man

a man born of the Virgin Mary. In this reſpect he endured a life full of hardſhips and afflictions, and at laſt, though innocent, was put to a cruel and ignominious death, as a blaſphemer againſt God. He was from the firſt acknowledged as a prophet and teacher come from God, on account of his miracles. He was likewiſe that lawgiver promiſed by Moſes to the Iſraelites to be raiſed up from among their brethren, (Deut. xviii. 18.) that they might not be terrified by hearing the voice of God, and beholding the majeſty of his preſence. He was a prieſt of the order of Melchizedech, that he might offer a more valuable ſacrifice than the ſons of Aaron, and eſtabliſh a new covenant upon better promiſes. He was born king of the Jews to rule in righteouſneſs, and to ſit upon the throne of David for ever. But as his kingdom was not of this world, we muſt farther conſider him as our Saviour, who came to redeem us from ſin, to reconcile us to our offended Father, and to purify unto himſelf a peculiar people zealous of good works. And, laſtly, he is deſcribed in ſcrip-

ture as the only begotten Son of God. All theſe characters are conſiſtent, and all founded upon plain declarations of holy writ. But it is not to be expected, that they all ſhould be mentioned every time that our Lord is ſpoken of in any capacity; nor can we juſtly conclude, that our Saviour's divinity is denied, merely becauſe his human nature is aſſerted. He is called indeed a man by St. Peter, in his firſt diſcourſe to the Jews. But he is called *a man approved of God by miracles, and ſigns, and wonders*; whom *they by wicked hands had crucified and ſlain.* (Acts ii. 22, 23.) The crime of which he was accuſed was, that he ſaid he was the Son of God. When St. Peter therefore charges the Jews with wickedneſs and ignorance, he aſſerts the divine nature of our Saviour, and calls upon the people to acknowledge him as the Meſſiah. It is poſſible to evade the force of many texts, which aſcribe to our Saviour the divine attributes, if we obſtinately inſiſt, that they are to be underſtood of him in the loweſt ſenſe; becauſe they are ſometimes aſcribed to others figuratively in ſimilar expreſſions.

ſions. But were it poſſible, that each text alone might be underſtood in a figurative manner, and a lower ſenſe; yet if we have a deſire to find the true meaning of the ſcriptures, let us ſeriouſly conſider, whether the literal or figurative ſenſe be moſt proper in thoſe paſſages, whether they are not applied to our Saviour in far greater number and variety than to any other perſon, and whether our opinion be not confirmed, that he is truly and properly the Son of God, by ſome expreſſions, which cannot be applied to a mere man without the greateſt force.

When we obſerve in the Old Teſtament, that he is called God in numerous places by the name of Jehovah, and in the New, that the Father is ſaid to communicate omnipotence to the Son, that he knew what was in man, and that he is called one with the Father on the moſt important occaſions, and ſeemingly in the moſt intimate ſenſe; we ought not to take theſe words in the loweſt degree in which they are ever uſed, if we deſire, without prejudice, to find the truth;

but ſhould rather conclude from ſuch collective evidence, that our Saviour's dignity far exceeded that of all other prophets. And if to theſe we add, that he is called the only begotten Son of God; that he was conceived miraculouſly without a human father; that he was not ſubject to ſin, though made like to us in all other things; that he not only exiſted before his incarnation, but enjoyed with God, before the foundation of the world, the ſame glory, which he now poſſeſſes; that the ſame Word, which was made fleſh, is aſſerted by St. John to be God; that God by him made the worlds, and has appointed him to be the judge of all mankind; that he is mentioned as an heir by nature, as we, on his account, are by adoption; and that in compariſon with him Moſes is eſteemed only a faithful ſervant, whilſt he is acknowledged as a ſon in his own houſe; can we think it probable, that the ſacred writers meant to repreſent him as a mere man? or what ſtronger expreſſions could they uſe, if they intended to make us believe, that he was truly the Son of God in a ſenſe

a ſenſe ſuperior to all others, and ſtrictly ſpeaking a divine perſon in unity with the Father? I proceed,

Secondly, to compare the principal doctrines of the Church of England with the tenets of our adverſaries, to determine which are moſt agreeable to the holy ſcriptures.

The faith of the Church of England in many of the moſt fundamental articles of religion, is partly or entirely allowed by the church of Rome. They entirely agree with us in the doctrine of the Trinity, and acknowledge the incarnation, atonement, and reſurrection of Chriſt. They do not deny his ſupremacy over the church, though they ſuppoſe him to have delegated ſuch a power to ſome of his miniſters, as gives them a legiſlative authority of indefinite extent. They grant the ſcriptures to be the word of God, and allow the neceſſity both of faith and morality. The ſacraments, which we uſe in obedience to our Saviour, are by them believed to have been inſtituted by him for the

very ſame purpoſe, for which they are applied by the church of England. When therefore we profeſs ſo much of what they acknowledge to be the true faith; the articles, in which we differ, ought on their ſide to be proved neceſſary and agreeable to the word of God, before they treat us as heretics out of the pale of ſalvation, and encourage their followers to believe, that our worſhip is to be avoided equally with death. But the power of the Pope, if they could prove his ſucceſſion from St. Peter, is not ſettled conſiſtently by their own writers. His claims have been ſometimes contradicted and diſallowed by general councils. And a modern champion, after he has juſtly defined the Pope's real power to be what he had from the beginning, leaves the queſtion ſtill undecided by confeſſing, that it is impoſſible clearly to define what acts of his juriſdiction were granted by our Saviour, and what were founded upon human conceſſions. Tranſubſtantiation alſo, which formerly was looked upon as the teſt of their faith, is now explained away into a doctrine, which equal-

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ly contradicts the deciſion of the council of Trent, as it does the opinion of the church of England. And if there ſhould be an inviſible change in the ſacramental elements, we might reaſonably expect to reap the ſame benefit; as our miniſters derive their authority from the apoſtles, by a ſucceſſion equally regular, as we conſecrate the elements for the ſame purpoſe of ſpiritual ſuſtenance, and fix our faith and hopes upon the ſame Saviour. Let them therefore ſhew where we are commanded in the holy ſcriptures to accept in all ages, and through all changes, the faith of the church of Rome; or prove, that their preſent belief is conformable to the doctrine delivered by the apoſtles. The worſhip of images, the interceſſion of ſaints, the uſe of indulgences, and a few other doctrines, are ſo far ſoftened and amended in ſome more enlightened kingdoms, that we might hope for a reformation of their church nearly to the ſtandard of the ſcriptures, if they would diſcard their fancied ſuperiority, diſmiſs their dependence upon what they ſtyle a centre of union, and refuſe to ſubmit to human au-

thority, unſupported by divine. But though they now defend theſe points in ſuch a manner, as to ſtrive to perſuade us, that they differ little from our doctrines in this age and nation; yet it is moſt evident, that their writers formerly recommended ſuperſtitious practices to a very great extent; and it is probable, that numbers of their communion remain immerſed in bigotry and ignorance; and conſequently retain the ancient opinions; whilſt they pretend at the ſame time, that their church is remarkable above others for the unity of its faith.

But ſome, who approve of the reformation from the errors of popery, think, that the alteration of their doctrines ſhould have proceeded much farther. It is urged, that we are more enlightened in our underſtandings than our fathers, and that our minds are become free from many of their prejudices. But as they enjoyed the ſame natural abilities, and profeſſed to be guided by a rational interpretation of the holy ſcriptures, we ſhould carefully examine, whether any propoſed

propoſed change in our faith be agreeable to the word of God, before we proceed to alterations, which may materially affect ſome eſſential articles of the chriſtian religion. Freedom from ancient prejudices will not conſtitute the [illegible] of any generation more impartial judges than their forefathers; unleſs it can be truly aſſerted, that they have contracted no others equally bad. When we derive our opinions from information, reaſon, and ſenſe, we may err in either extreme, if we exclude any of theſe principles from its proper province, or allow it authority beyond its ſphere.

With reſpect to heavenly things, as they are inviſible, they cannot be the objects of ſenſe. And reaſon on that account can only argue by analogy, and draw inferences of their properties from their effects in the creation. The exiſtence, power, and goodneſs of God are manifeſt from the things that are ſeen. But his nature, juſtice, and mercy muſt be learned chiefly from what he has communicated of himſelf by revelation. We

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at preſent *ſee through a glaſs darkly*, in compariſon of that knowledge, when the righteous ſhall be admitted to the preſence of God, and ſhall *ſee him as he is*. And if we allow the authority of ſcripture to be ſuperior to the deductions of reaſon aided by philoſophy, we ſhall find no ſufficient cauſe to alter the faith of the church of England in eſſential articles.

The doctrine of our Saviour's divinity has been ranked amongſt thoſe corruptions of chriſtianity, which aroſe from the prejudices of ſome early converts, who wanted to accommodate the truths of our religion to their former tenets. But St. John, as before obſerved, who certainly did not borrow his opinions or his language from Plato, ſays, "the Λόγος was God and was made fleſh." Power, majeſty, wiſdom, and glory are frequently in ſcripture aſcribed to our Saviour in an unlimited manner. For the purpoſe indeed of our redemption, he put on human nature, in which ſtate he bare our infirmities without our guilt, and was voluntarily

ſubject

ſubject to moſt of the evils and miſeries of life, though under the eſpecial care of providence, and promiſed in all dangers the miniſtry of angels. But when, beſides being called the only begotten Son of God, he is ſet far above all prophets, by being ſent for a much nobler purpoſe, and made the chief ſubject of their predictions; and when he is exalted above all principalities, is appointed the final Judge of the whole world, and hath all power committed unto him in heaven and in earth; the language of ſcripture, concerning his dignity, ſeems perfectly conſiſtent with his humility and ſufferings, on this ſuppoſition, and this only, that he united the divine and human nature in one perſon. The manner and conſequences of this union exceed our comprehenſion. But with our preſent faculties, *can we by ſearching find out God? can we find out the Almighty unto perfection?* (Job xi. 7.) For if he was only a mere man, and a mere prophet, commiſſioned like others to preach morality and repentance, and if he intended to make us rely upon our own merits, and to hope for eternal life as the proper

proper reward of our obedience; the apoſtles would ſeem to have inſtilled into us very erroneous notions of his nature and dignity. It is incumbent therefore upon our adverſaries to explain, how it is conſiſtent with their principles, that ſuch a preference ſhould be given to Chriſt, as never was attributed to any other mortal; why the moſt innocent and only perfect man ſhould ſuffer a painful and ignominious death, if it anſwered no other purpoſe than to prove the certainty of a reſurrection by his own example; and why we are enjoined faith in him alone, if God had no regard to his ſufferings, merits, and mediation. Till theſe difficulties are ſatisfactorily removed, we muſt conclude, that the faith of the church of England upon this article is more agreeable to a plain and rational interpretation of the ſcriptures; though the doctrines degrading the knowledge, power and authority of Chriſt, almoſt to a level with our own, may be more flattering to the pride of philoſophy.

How far the doctrines of the ſcriptures are intended

intended to be repreſented as uncertain in themſelves, or miſtaken by our firſt reformers, cannot yet be determined. But that the opinions received by the church of England concerning the inviſible world, and conſequently the ſtate of future rewards and puniſhments, are deſigned to be weakened, is very evident; ſince it has lately been aſſerted*, that "the principle of evil is perſonified, in the book of Job, under the name "of Satan, agreeably to the oriental mythology, in order to obviate the indecorum "and impiety of aſcribing events, apparently contrary to the perfection of the divine "attributes, to the immediate agency of "God: that the exiſtence of this evil being, "as a real intelligent agent, is neither an "article of the Chriſtian nor of the Jewiſh "revelation†; and that, however ſeriouſly it "may have been believed by the generality "both of Jews and Chriſtians, it can claim "no other credence than is due to an article "retained from the ancient popular faith,

* Eſſays, Ph. H. and Lit. page 198.

† Page 199.

"originally

" originally founded, doubtleſs, on the Ma-
" nichæan principles, embraced by the phi-
" loſophers of the eaſt."

But if we compare the opinion of the Manichæans with the belief of the Jews and Chriſtians, we ſhall find, that they differ in important points, and that the latter is well ſupported by the ſcripture, and not contradicted by reaſon. The Manichæans believed, that there were two independent principles, one of which was the cauſe of all good, and the other of all evil, both natural and moral. But it is falſe and inconſiſtent as well with reaſon as ſcripture to ſuppoſe, that there can be any being independent of God. It is alſo a miſtake to imagine, that any natural evil can be produced without his will and concurrence. *I make peace, ſays he, and I create evil.* (Iſ. vii. 14.) *Shall there be evil in a city, and the Lord hath not done it?* (Am. iii. 6.) But the origin of moral evil is beſt attributed to the perverſe abuſe of free will; and is uniformly repreſented in the ſacred writings, with reſpect to man's actions, as proceed-

proceeding from the ſuggeſtions of our ſpiritual enemy, and the inſtigation of our own luſts. The perſonal exiſtence of the Devil is not only probable to thoſe, who allow the poſſibility of angels, and ſee the reality of wicked men; but is proved by the teſtimony of numerous paſſages of ſcripture of ſuch various kinds, that they are not all liable to the ſame evaſions. Our Saviour's temptation in the wilderneſs is expreſsly recorded. As it was impoſſible, that he ſhould be internally tempted, who was the only ſpotleſs Lamb of God, who did no ſin, neither was guile found in his mouth, and whoſe conſtant deſire in all ſituations was to fulfil the will of his heavenly Father, we muſt by all the rules of reaſon underſtand the account of the evangeliſts literally, that he was ſuffered to be tempted by our ſpiritual enemy, in order that he might gain a ſignal victory, and teach us by his own example three important leſſons; never to deſpair of the divine protection, not to expoſe ourſelves to needleſs dangers upon a falſe interpretation of God's general promiſes, and to prefer his ſervice to the acquiſition

quiſition of all the riches, pleaſures, and honours of this world. Our Lord's temptation is compared by this author* "to the "viſions of the ancient prophets," and called "a prophetic and divinely inſtructive "viſion imparted to Chriſt." But ſuch an interpretation ſhould be ſupported by ſomething ſtronger than mere aſſertions. It ſhould be proved, that the expreſſions ὑπὸ τῦ πνεύματος and ἐν τῷ πνέυματι convey the ſame meaning. And it is equally neceſſary to be pointed out, what inſtruction Chriſt would have received from "a ſcenical repreſenta-"tion of a temptation by an evil ſpirit," if no ſuch ſpirit ever exiſted. The viſions of the prophets are related in ſuch a manner, that they can be miſtaken for facts only by the vulgar. But the account of our Saviour's temptation is given by the evangeliſts in ſuch words as naturally convey to all, the idea of a real tranſaction.

The ſacred writers alſo ſpeak of the Devil as a real perſon, whom our Saviour came to

* Pages 199, 200.

ſubdue,

ſubdue, when they give us an account of our Lord's commiſſion to his apoſtles. He gave them power to caſt out unclean ſpirits. And when they ſeemed to rejoice, that the devils, as well as diſeaſes, were obedient to their command, he obſerves, that he had ſeen Satan as lightning fall from heaven. Satan cannot by any figure be here put for the principle of evil; ſince in whatever ſenſe an abſtract principle was once in any place, it muſt remain in the ſame for ever. But an evil ſpirit might be created innocent, and admitted to partake of heavenly joys; though it may now be expelled from that ſeat of bliſs for pride, diſobedience, or rebellion, and condemned to live in conſtant terror of the juſt judgment of the laſt day. Accordingly St. James repreſents the evil ſpirits, as intelligent beings, endued with knowledge, and capable of fear; *the devils alſo believe and tremble.* (Jam. ii. 19.)

St. Peter alſo warns us to be *ſober and vigilant, becauſe our adverſary the Devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, ſeeking whom he*

may devour. (1 Pet. v. 8.) This is evidently not the deſcription of an abſtract principle; but of a ſubtle, malignant, and active enemy, who is perpetually contriving ſchemes to draw us into error and vice, and thus to reduce us to a level with himſelf, and accompliſh our final deſtruction.

But the moſt deciſive argument for the perſonal exiſtence of the Devil may be found in our Saviour's deſcription of the day of judgment. He there informs us, that he will condemn the wicked *to everlaſting fire, prepared for the Devil and his angels.* (Mat. xxv. 41.) That the wicked will be puniſhed at the day of judgment no one, that believes the ſcriptures, can deny. But it is manifeſt, that the Devil and his angels are here ſpoken of as equally to be puniſhed with wicked men. Theſe words of our Saviour ſhew moreover the infinite mercy of God towards mankind, in that he has through Chriſt offered pardon and ſalvation to all, and will finally condemn none, but the obſtinate and impenitent, who have voluntarily yielded themſelves

themſelves ſervants to ſin, and wilfully rejected the means of grace. From all theſe texts it is evident, that we have a ſpiritual enemy, who conſtantly endeavours to draw us from our duty, that chriſtians are concerned to beware of his arts, and that to diſbelieve his exiſtence will make us careleſs in avoiding his dangerous ſnares, and may have a pernicious influence upon our moral conduct.

Another doctrine retained at the Reformation, which has been lately treated as a corruption of chriſtianity, is the union of the ſoul with the body, as two diſtinct principles in the formation of man. It is true, that a reſurrection of the body to future happineſs might be effected by the power of God, if it were poſſible, that a thinking animal could be compoſed of matter alone. And it is likewiſe true, that we cannot demonſtrate how we are made, ſo as to prove the abſolute impoſſibility of the wildeſt imaginations, except they contradict the plain meaning of the ſcriptures. But it is very

dangerous, raſhly to unſettle men's notions concerning inviſible ſubjects, leſt they loſe all ſteadineſs ariſing from firſt principles. A complete view of the doctrines of the ſcripture will convince us, that man is there repreſented as compoſed of two conſtituent parts, united in life, and diſſolved at death; and therefore that the general opinion of the exiſtence of an immaterial ſpirit within us is not a corruption of chriſtianity, but a truth conſiſtent with our religion, and probably flowing from the nature of God.

Of all the probabilities, which are the diſcoveries of reaſon, or the reſult of our perception, one of the plaineſt, firmeſt, and moſt univerſally acknowledged ſeems to be, that matter is naturally paſſive, and cannot produce motion, thought, and diſcourſe by any imaginable modification of its parts, without the union or impulſe of what we diſtinguiſh by the name of ſpirit. It is to beg the queſtion to ſuppoſe matter and ſpirit to be endued with the ſame properties, upon the principles of philoſophy, unleſs the fact

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were ſupported by the teſtimony of revelation, or that ſome particular organization could be clearly pointed out, and proved capable of beſtowing the faculty of reaſon. Men may heap together a number of words, experiments, ſuppoſitions, and teſtimonies, and may affirm or deny at pleaſure the properties of matter; but except they can ſhew the neceſſity of what they aſſign as a cauſe, and its conſtant connexion with what they aſſert to be its effect, or rely upon the information, rightly apprehended, of ſome ſuperior being, whoſe knowledge is more extenſive, their pretended demonſtrations will be only conjectures.

But if we will be guided by a fair and reaſonable interpretation of ſcripture, and allow its due authority to the word of God, it is evident, that man is a compound being, conſiſting of a ſoul as well as body; ſuperior to mere matter in a principle of ſelf-motion, and diſtinguiſhed from the brutes in having reaſon for his guide, and power to pay his Maker a voluntary ſervice. The

very firſt, as well as moſt authentic account, that we have of man, informs us that he was made *in the image of God.* (Gen. i. 27.) This cannot refer to his being formed out of the duſt; ſince God is a ſpirit, and has nothing, which can be imitated by the pureſt matter. The image of God therefore in man appears to be much better explained by the word *ſoul*, as denoting ſomething of a different nature, capable of righteouſneſs and true holineſs, than by any organization of matter. As to the objection, that the ſame word, which is frequently tranſlated ſoul, is ſometimes applied to the dead body, it may be obſerved, that, whilſt we believe man to conſiſt of an union of ſoul and body, we often deſcribe his perſonality by either of them indifferently; and thence it may happen in ſome languages, that the word, which ſignifies the principle of life, may be applied to the perſon of a man, even when dead, provided his perſonality only and diſtinction from others are deſigned to be mentioned, and not an authentic detail given of the whole of his compoſition. Words are

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uſed both by the vulgar and learned with ſuch latitude, that an argument cannot be properly founded upon the uſe of a ſingle expreſſion; except where it is placed technically, or with avowed preciſion. And it is no where declared, that man's being formed of the duſt of the earth and becoming a living ſoul is the whole account of his nature, if we leave out the principal circumſtance, mentioned in the former chapter, and explanatory of the reſt, that he was created in the image of God. Now that *God is a ſpirit* (Jo. iv. 24.) we are informed by our Saviour, who thence directs us *to worſhip him in ſpirit and in truth*; in oppoſition to the heathens, who were guilty of offences againſt morality in honour of their gods, and in diſtinction from the Jews, who relied upon ceremonies that were only types of inward purity.

And excepting this account of the firſt formation of man, we have no reaſon to expect from the ſcriptures a full revelation of his nature, till the time of the goſpel,

which brought life and immortality to light. Though even under the law Moſes cautions the Iſraelites not to degrade the idea of God by making a material image to be worſhipped as a repreſentation of his perſon or nature; ſince they ſaw no ſimilitude, when he deſcended in glory upon Mount Sinai. But notwithſtanding the inferiority of the Jews in religious knowledge, there appear evident traces, that they believed ſome principle to be in man ſuperior to duſt and aſhes, and that they expected a more complete diſcovery of our nature and duty. That death did not deſtroy the whole man, they muſt conclude from the appearance of Samuel to Saul, when he foretold his deſtruction for diſobeying the word of the Lord, which could not be known in all its circumſtances by any evil ſpirit. And the very application of Saul to the woman of Endor ſhewed it to be the general opinion, that ſomething ſurvived the grave. The teſtimony of Solomon is ſtrong to the ſame purpoſe: *Then*, ſays he, *ſhall the dûſt return to the earth as it was: and the ſpirit ſhall return unto God who gave*

gave it. (Eccl. xii. 7.) And it is no contradiction to this, that every imagination of man is ſometimes repreſented as ceaſing at death; ſince an impartial review of thoſe paſſages would evidently ſhew, that they mean his worldly ſchemes and purſuits, or the power of making known the excellence of his Creator amongſt mankind.

In the doctrine likewiſe of our Saviour and his apoſtles, which contains every article of knowledge that is neceſſary to ſalvation, we find two different principles plainly mentioned; one enabling us to receive the knowledge of God, and the other as the chief ſource of ſin and diſobedience.

St. Paul makes an evident diſtinction between the body and ſpirit in the ſixth chapter of his firſt Epiſtle to the Corinthians, (v. 20.) where he exhorts his converts *to glorify God in their body, and in their ſpirit, which are God's.* To aſſert that our Saviour and his apoſtles uſed the word ſpirit in conformity with popular opinion, though they knew

knew that man had no ſpirit diſtinct from the organization of his body, would be to take an unwarrantable liberty with the language of ſcripture. It is true that the words belonging to other ſciences are uſed by our Lord and the inſpired writers in their common acceptation; as the ſcriptures were neither intended to inſtruct us in natural philoſophy, nor claim any ſupport from its teſtimony. They are not the wiſdom of man; but the power and revelation of God. But in all doctrines, that are neceſſary to the knowledge of religion, we may depend upon as full an account of every particular, as our nature is capable of receiving at preſent. When therefore in his Epiſtle to the Romans (vii. 23.) St. Paul ſpeaks *of a law in our members warring againſt the law of our mind*, and tells the Galatians, (v. 17.) that *the fleſh luſteth againſt the ſpirit, and the ſpirit againſt the fleſh, and* that *theſe are contrary the one to the other*, he plainly confirms the general opinion of chriſtians, that man is compoſed of two principles; one of which would acknowledge, that *the law is holy, and the commandment holy*,

holy, juſt, and good, (Rom. vii. 12.) if the connexion, which it has with the world by its union with the other, did not frequently lead us into temptation.

And that the ſoul of man is capable of acquiring knowledge by revelation, without the aſſiſtance of the bodily ſenſes, is plain from the information of the ſame apoſtle. *I knew a man,* ſays he, *in Chriſt, above fourteen years ago, (whether in the body, I cannot tell; or whether out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth) ſuch an one caught up to the third heaven. And I knew ſuch a man, (whether in the body, or out of the body, I cannot tell, God knoweth) how that he was caught up into Paradiſe, and heard unſpeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter.* (2 Cor. xii. 2, 3, 4.) Had he believed, that a man's body is the whole of his perſon, it appears impoſſible that he could have any doubt of the concurrence of his body in this viſion. And if St. Paul had known, that the capacity of thought could ariſe from the organization of the brain without any other principle, we might

might reaſonably expect, that he would not have declared himſelf a Phariſee, and the ſon of a Phariſee, without mentioning that they were miſtaken in ſuppoſing a ſeparate ſpirit.

The promiſe likewiſe of our Saviour to the penitent thief ſtrongly argues the exiſtence of the ſoul ſeparate from the body. *To-day*, ſays he, *ſhalt thou be with me in Paradiſe*. (Luke xxiii. 43.) This muſt in our apprehenſion mean ſome poſitive ſtate of bliſs; though it may well conſiſt with the full reward of his faith being completed at the general reſurrection. To this may be added the difficulty, under which St. Paul declared that he laboured, when *he deſired to depart, and to be with Chriſt, as better* for himſelf; though *to abide in the fleſh was more needful* for his converts. (Phil. i. 23, 24.) If his ſoul was to reſt inactive in the grave, or his power of thinking to be ſuſpended, he might have enjoyed the ſame reward equally ſoon, though his life had been prolonged; and we have his own teſtimony, (Rom. v. 3. 2 Cor. xii. 15.) that he fainted not at tribulation, nor declined

declined any hardſhip for the good of the church. Whilſt theſe texts remain, the ſcriptures cannot be appealed to, as giving no countenance to the doctrine of a ſpiritual ſubſtance united to a material body; ſince they plainly inform us, that the ſame man, who was formed of the duſt of the ground, was alſo created in the image of God.

Since then the Church of England acknowledges the ſcriptures, rationally interpreted, as the ſole rule of her faith, and profeſſes to have reformed herſelf from the errors of the church of Rome by the tenor and authority of the word of God; let us bring all doctrines to this ſacred teſt; and let us neither be charmed with the antiquity of an opinion, if unſupported by the ſcriptures, nor dazzled with its novelty, if deſtitute of that foundation. But duly ſenſible of the weakneſs of our natural faculties, the obſcurity and myſteriouſneſs of the objects of our faith, and the many errors, to which we are liable from our prejudices and paſſions, let us not be wiſe in our own conceits, nor lean too

too much to our own underſtanding; let us not aim to diſcover or judge the myſteries of God by the rules of philoſophy; and above all let us regulate our hearts and purify our diſpoſitions. If we thus apply ourſelves to the ſtudy of religion, we may reaſonably hope for a bleſſing upon our endeavours, and an increaſe of true wiſdom; and may in ſome meaſure ſay with holy David, when compared with thoſe, who are careleſs, or truſt too much to their own abilities, *I have more underſtanding than my teachers: for thy teſtimonies are my ſtudy. I am wiſer than the aged: becauſe I keep thy commandments.* (Pſ. cxix. 99, 100.)

THE NECESSITY OF OBEDIENCE.

JOHN xiii. 17.

If ye know theſe things, happy are ye, if ye do them.

THESE words were ſpoken by our Saviour to his diſciples after he had ſet them an eminent leſſon of humility, and exhorted them to follow his example; and they may be equally applied to all his precepts. He came down from heaven to reinſtate us in the way of ſalvation. He procured our pardon upon repentance, inſtructed us in our duty, and obtained for us the aſſiſtance of the holy Spirit. But ſtill he requires our own concurrence, and that our faith and knowledge be perfected by obedience.

ence. I ſhall therefore in my following diſcourſe,

Firſt, ſhew what effect the profeſſion of chriſtianity ought to have upon our diſpoſitions.

Secondly, what kind of actions neceſſarily proceed from a true faith. And,

Thirdly, what care we ought to take to regulate our words.

Firſt, I am to ſhew, what effect the profeſſion of chriſtianity ought to have upon our diſpoſitions.

As the Goſpel diſcovers the attributes of God in the cleareſt manner, which we can at preſent comprehend; the duties ariſing from our relation to him are equally evident. Reverence naturally ariſes in our minds upon the conſideration of our almighty Creator. And even the wicked have no method of ſetting themſelves free from the awe of the divine

divine preſence, except by forgetting the being or true nature of God. In like manner his unexampled goodneſs diſplayed in our redemption ſhould diſpoſe our hearts to the moſt lively ſenſe of gratitude; and both together ſhould beget in us that filial reſpect, which ariſes in the breaſt of a repenting Son pardoned by a moſt merciful and gracious Father. We ſhould therefore earneſtly deſire to know his will; ſtudy without partiality to underſtand the true ſenſe of that revelation, which he has compaſſionately beſtowed upon us; habitually prefer our duty to the gratification of our luſts and paſſions; and admit no compariſon between the tranſitory joys and riches of this world, and our everlaſting reward in the next, when they come into competition, and one muſt be forſaken to obtain the other.

The chriſtian religion contributes likewiſe to reform our diſpoſition by enjoining a perfect and univerſal benevolence towards mankind. By ſin the ſoul was made capable of hatred. And all the diſturbances that ariſe

in the world proceed at firſt from our unruly paſſions. *From whence,* ſays St. James, (Ja. iv. 1.) *come wars and fightings among you? come they not hence, even of your luſts, that war in your members? But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace,* (Gal. v. 22.) and all the benevolent and amiable qualities. We are not only taught to love men as our brethren, and that God *hath made of one blood all nations, for to dwell on all the face of the earth*; (Acts xvii. 26.) but we are commanded to imitate the divine mercy and goodneſs; to do good to thoſe, from whom we can hope for no return; and to aſſiſt and relieve our bittereſt enemies. And that we may never forget our obligation to this duty, we are ordered to offer up our daily petitions for the forgiveneſs of our own ſins upon the expreſs condition, that we forgive others. The rule given by our Saviour for the exerciſe of our benevolence is both plain and comprehenſive. It extends to every thing conſiſtent with juſtice and our own ſafety; and applies to our genuine feelings, when diveſted of partiality. *Whatſoever ye would*

that

that men ſhould do to you, do ye even ſo to them, for this is the law and the prophets. (Mat. vii. 12.) For however covetouſneſs and revenge may harden the heart, when our own intereſt is concerned; yet compaſſion and mercy are ſo natural to the dictates of reaſon, that no one ever diſcommended a charitable action, or refuſed praiſe to a generous forgiveneſs of injuries. But though reaſon approves the exerciſe of benevolence in all caſes; yet our evil paſſions are ſo prevalent, that they frequently prompt us to cruelty and revenge. Our Saviour therefore has ſettled this duty upon the principle of our obedience to God, as well as our relation to mankind; and eſtabliſhed it with the ſtrongeſt ſanction; namely, our own hopes of pardon, and future reward. *If ye forgive men their treſpaſſes, your heavenly Father will alſo forgive you. But if ye forgive not men their treſpaſſes, neither will your Father forgive your treſpaſſes.* (Mat. vi. 14, 15.)

And if we deſire to regulate our diſpoſitions, we muſt make them pure and obedi-

ent to the will of God. It is the higheſt honour to a man to reſemble the divine nature. And it is our duty to confine our deſires within the limits allowed by our heavenly Father. *Ye ſhall be holy*, ſays God to the Jews, *for I the Lord your God am holy.* (Lev. xix. 2.) And our Saviour commands his diſciples to be *perfect, even as our Father, which is in heaven, is perfect.* (Mat. v. 48.) For though we cannot attain to the abſolute perfection of God; yet we are required, as far as poſſible, to imitate his purity and goodneſs. *Know ye not*, ſays St. Paul (1 Cor. vi. 19.) *that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghoſt?* Many, who profeſs our holy religion, ſeem to form a very wrong ſtandard of chriſtian perfection. If their outward actions appear right in general, or if they are juſtified by the common maxims of the world, or can be defended by artful palliations, they are ſatisfied of their own goodneſs, though they have reaſon to ſuſpect, that their principles and motives were mixed with evil, and that they would in many caſes have been guilty of open acts of wickedneſs, if leiſure, abi-

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lity, or opportunity, had not been wanting. Ignorance indeed and infirmity will be allowed as excuſes for numbers of our faults. But theſe cannot be pleaded, unleſs we ſtrive to underſtand our duty, and amend our failings; ſince we are told by the higheſt authority, that a ſettled deſire of what is unlawful includes the guilt of a ſinful action, and that the precepts, which forbid the greateſt degrees of wickedneſs, forbid all approaches to the ſame crime. Sincerity then is the teſt of our goodneſs. And if we deſire to fulfil the will of God, we ſhall not only leſſen the force of temptations, but may by prayer obtain ſuch aſſiſtance, as will certainly enable us to go on to perfection. I proceed,

Secondly, to ſhew what kind of actions neceſſarily proceed from a true faith.

And, firſt, we ought to expreſs our piety by the conſtant worſhip of God. From him we received our being, with all the bleſſings of life. To his protection we are indebted

in every ſituation for ſafety and deliverance. And to his bounty we owe all our hopes of future reward. The evils of this life are inflicted as trials of our faith, or chaſtiſements for our ſins, and may all therefore work for our good, if they bring us to due conſideration and amendment, by averting our puniſhment and increaſing our reward. If then we conſider God as our Creator, Benefactor, King, and Judge, we muſt pay him our conſtant tribute of praiſe and thankſgiving; we muſt apply to him for help in every diſtreſs; and ſtrive earneſtly to learn his will, that we may prove our gratitude by a filial obedience. The duty of prayer is ſo evident, that it cannot be denied, except men avow their diſregard of God, and are reſolved to follow without controul their wicked imaginations. And if we allow, that men ſhould daily look up to their heavenly Father in their ſecret addreſſes, it neceſſarily follows, that it is both lawful and expedient to do the ſame in public upon all ſtated occaſions. It is true, that a lifeleſs attendance upon public worſhip is of little ſervice, and that hypocriſy in religion

ligion will add to men's condemnation. But real piety is certainly the beſt foundation for perfection in morality, and the neglect of a due obſervation of the Sabbath, is a very great cauſe of that torrent of wickedneſs and diſſenſion, which at preſent prevails in the world. When men neglect their public homage to God, they will by degrees forget their dependence upon him, and diſregard the laws of juſtice and the duties of their ſtation. Their private prayers will ſeldom long continue, when they have caſt off the outward ſhew of religion. And when they have diſmiſſed the principles of piety, they have got free from the checks of conſcience, which threatens divine juſtice for all ſecret crimes, and are left to the uncertain reſtraint of human laws, the natural rectitude of their inclinations, or the capricious dictates of honour. An individual without a due ſenſe of God is dangerous to be truſted. And a nation, which has generally caſt off his fear, ſeems ripe for deſtruction.

Our duty towards mankind is very eaſy

to be practiſed in all our actions, if our minds be kept free from envy, pride, covetouſneſs, and other ſelfiſh affections, and be filled with that benevolence, which becomes a Chriſtian. When we love our neighbour as ourſelves, and are willing to treat him, as we deſire to be treated in return, there is no danger, that we ſhould wilfully do him any injury or injuſtice. St. Paul obſerves, (Ro. xiii. 10.) that *love worketh no ill to his neighbour: therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.* The ſame principle will impel us to give him all the aſſiſtance in our power, when involved in any calamity, or overtaken by diſtreſs. A true Chriſtian, like the good Samaritan, wants no inducement to exerciſe his charity, beyond his gratitude to God, and the calls of humanity. *If he meet his enemy's ox or his aſs going aſtray, he will ſurely bring it back to him again. If he ſee the aſs of him that hateth him lying under his burthen, he will ſurely help with him.* (Ex. xxiii. 4, 5.) He will be aſhamed to be deficient in thoſe inſtances of kindneſs, which were expreſsly commanded to the Jews by the law of Moſes. And he will

will behave himſelf towards all the world according to the ſpirit recommended by our Saviour, and not the falſe gloſſes invented by the Scribes and Phariſees. Nothing, in ſhort, can excite his oppoſition but the defence of his own or others rights. And nothing can raiſe his laſting indignation, but injuſtice, oppreſſion, or wanton rebellion.

But there are other evil actions, in which men often indulge with leſs reſtraint, becauſe they ſeem chiefly to tranſgreſs againſt themſelves. Such are all breaches of chaſtity and temperance. Theſe vices, though palliated by the guilty, and paſſed over by the world in general, on account of their frequency, without due cenſure, tend not only to the ruin of the ſinner himſelf, but to the diminution of the peace, virtue, and happineſs of the world. Adultery is confeſſedly cruel and unjuſt. And all ſlighter offences of the ſame kind are fitly prohibited by the law of God, as they are not only impurities in Chriſtians, who are the temple of the Holy Ghoſt, and members of Chriſt, but hindrances of marriage,

riage, which alone can completely ſecure the happineſs of ſociety by taking due care of the preſervation and education of infants, and uniting in additional bonds of friendſhip the different families of mankind. The intemperate man alſo deſtroys his health, waſtes his time, weakens his reaſon, and renders himſelf an uſeleſs or prejudicial member of ſociety. And if it be admitted that chaſtity and temperance are ſo neceſſary to the very being of government, that an univerſal diſregard of theſe virtues would ſink the world into a ſtate of anarchy and barbarity, they muſt be binding in all caſes and upon all perſons; unleſs it could be ſhewn, that ſome have a peculiar privilege of diſobeying the laws of their Maker. God has indeed favoured particular perſons by giving them greater riches, wiſdom, and authority than others. But as his laws are founded in purity, juſtice, and truth, he has given no man, however exalted, a licence to ſin; but expects, on the contrary, that thoſe, who are moſt eminent, ſhould ſhine as lights in the world, and guide the weaker and more ignorant

rant by their good example, in the way of truth, virtue, and happineſs. I proceed,

Thirdly, to ſhew what care we ought to take to regulate our words.

For it is not by our actions alone, that we ſhew our obedience to the will of God; ſince our words alſo may greatly contribute to the promotion of virtue or increaſe of vice. With our tongues we ought to celebrate the praiſes of God, acknowledge his goodneſs, and profeſs his religion. But where men are not impreſſed with a due fear and reverence of his Majeſty, his holy name is blaſphemed by oaths and curſes. With reſpect to men likewiſe, we are capable of contracting much guilt by falſe, malicious, and injurious ſpeeches. Our words therefore ought to be carefully guarded; ſince the influence of our example is often more extenſive by them than by our actions. We can exhort, perſuade, and ſometimes convince men to ſet God conſtantly before their eyes, *to do all to his glory* (1 Cor. x. 31.) as much as is

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in their power, *to follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another.* (Ro. xiv. 19.) Or we may tranſgreſs our duty, and diſturb the happineſs of individuals by unjuſt calumny, ſow the ſeeds of hatred and diviſion in families or ſocieties by whiſperings and falſhoods, or ſtir up ſedition, and ſtrive to overturn kingdoms by undermining ſound principles, and filling the minds of the ignorant with falſe, miſchievous, and impracticable notions. And in this inſtance deceivers have a greater power to impoſe upon weak minds; becauſe men in general are willing to be flattered with an high opinion of their own wiſdom, merit, and importance. They can eaſily be made to believe, that they are able to conduct the buſineſs of the world with more prudence than their preſent rulers; that they deſerve a better lot than Providence has thought fit to beſtow upon them; and that they are entitled to controul others, and at the ſame time to follow their own inclinations with the utmoſt licentiouſneſs. But if we wiſh not to be deceived, we ſhould never loſe

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ſight of two plain maxims; that government and ſubordination are neceſſary to ſociety, and that lawful rulers can claim an obedience to their juſt commands by divine as well as human authority. Let us then, when we are enticed to anarchy, ſedition, and rebellion, under the ſpecious pretences of civil or religious liberty, remember the admonition of our Saviour, that *every kingdom divided againſt itſelf is brought to deſolation*, (Mat. 12. 25.) and the caution of the Apoſtle, (Gal. v. 15.) *If ye bite and devour one another, take heed, that ye be not conſumed one of another.* Every ſtate of life in this world, and every government, contains ſome evils and imperfections, which by wiſdom might be alleviated or removed. But we offend as much againſt prudence as our duty, if on account of moderate inconveniences we plunge into the miſeries of war, famine, and peſtilence, and leave our real rights at the mercy of the ambitious, or the diſcretion of the ignorant. And let the ſecret movers of ſedition ſeriouſly conſider, that they cannot foreſee to what crimes and exceſſes the rage of an ungoverned

governed multitude may proceed, that the event of human affairs, eſpecially in times of confuſion, is very uncertain, and that thoſe who truſt moſt to their own abilities, and lay the deepeſt ſchemes for unlawful innovations, are ſtill in danger of diſappointment, and may periſh like Achitophel, in the midſt of their own devices. And if they make uſe of falſe pretences or wicked arts, let them reflect, that God ſees clearly the thoughts of the heart, that he will judge men according to their real goodneſs, and not their outward appearance, and that the greateſt worldly ſucceſs will neither compenſate for the loſs of heaven; nor juſtify an evil action, and ſecure the ſinner from future puniſhment.

Since then religious knowledge is of ſuch importance to our right conduct in life and hopes of everlaſting ſalvation; ſince we have a complete and well authenticated ſyſtem of all neceſſary truths contained in the holy ſcriptures; and ſince we have the promiſe of heavenly aſſiſtance to enable us

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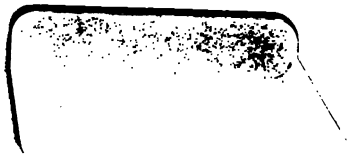
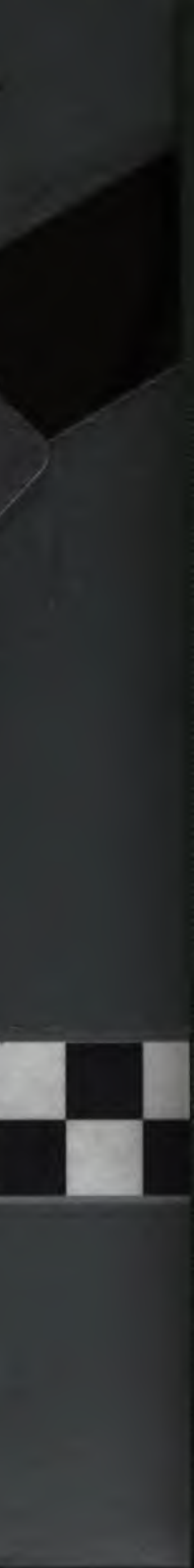
to fulfil our duty, if we endeavour to deſerve it by faith, piety, and diligence; let us ſtudy the word of God, with humility and thankfulneſs; let us believe his promiſes with full aſſurance of hope; let us cultivate our reaſon by all the means in our power, and draw our principles of religion from the proper ſources of divine inſpiration; let us ſo regulate our diſpoſitions, thoughts, and actions, as to make them conformable to the will and commands of our heavenly Father; let us prefer the diſcharge of our duty to all worldly advantages; let us conſcientiouſly practiſe the minuteſt virtues, and carefully guard againſt the ſin, which doth moſt eaſily beſet us; and fulfilling the relative duties of our reſpective ſtations, let us impreſs upon our minds the advice of the apoſtle, *Honour all men, love the brotherhood, fear God, honour the king.* (1 Pet. ii. 17.)

THE END.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